

HEAVEN SENT?

Why Microsoft's greatest console is the saviour of videogaming

gamesTM

PS3 | Xbox 360 | Revolution | PS2 | GC | Xbox | PC | GBA | PSP | DS | Arcade | Retro



HELL BOUND?

Why Microsoft's greatest console is dancing with the devil



So… black or white? Positive or negative? There's no way of knowing which of our two offerings you've gone for this issue (though it'll be interesting to see the figures in a few months' time) but if the experts are to be believed, there's some kind of psychological reasoning behind your choice… supposedly. Either way, there's no doubt that Microsoft has set itself down the path of no return – it's hard to suggest it'll be anything but a success, but could it have been handled better? There's certainly an argument for it. But then, you've caught us at an awkward time; just when our negativity was getting the better of us, it took a trip to BlizzCon – Blizzard's first fan-based event celebrating all things *Warcraft*, *Starcraft* and beyond – to open our eyes and awaken us from our recent cynical slumber. Here were over 8,000 people, all gathering because of a love of games; a genuine passion for the subject and not a cynical eye in the house. There we were, waiting for some grand epiphany to strike us from the sky to revitalise our enthusiasm… and all it took was the sight of a man dressed as an Lv60 Elite Tauren Chieftain. Hallelujah, indeed.

Martin Mathers
Editor

SCORE-1 HI-SCO
250

600

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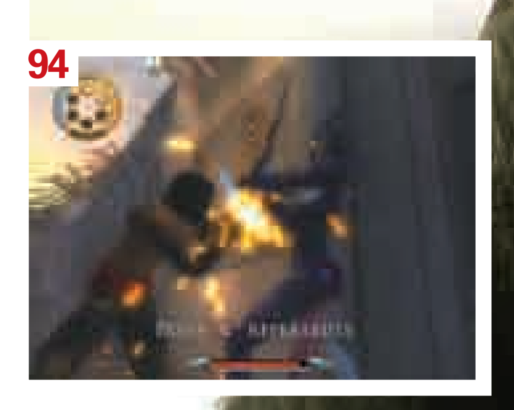
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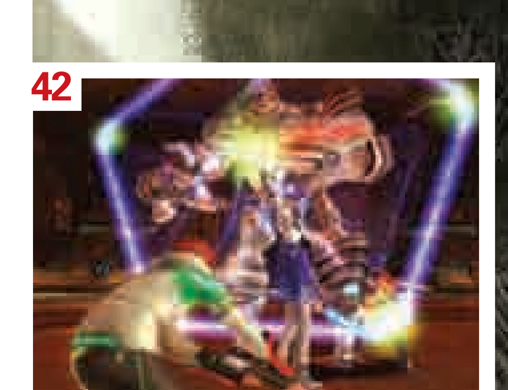
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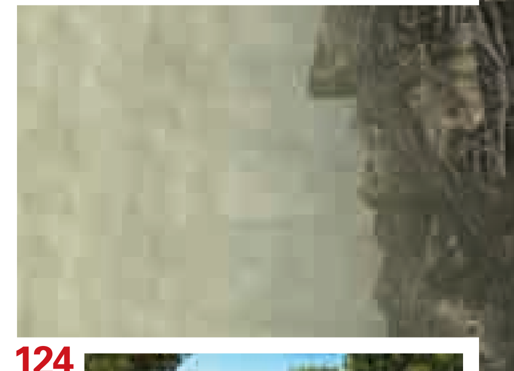
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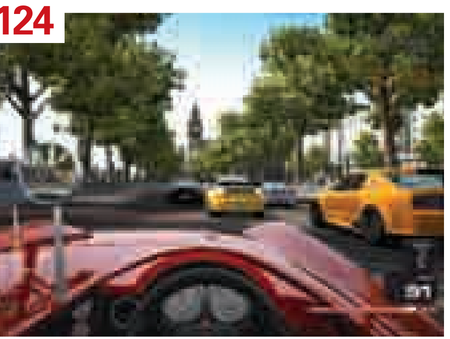
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Possibly the most beautiful game to ever appear on the PS2 – but did we have 'the balls' to give it a perfect ten? The answer lies just ahead of you…
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NINTENDO ANNOUNCES ONLINE PLANS IN EUROPE, IN COLLABORATION WITH MCDONALD'S

SUPER MARIO-

It's been a long time coming, but Nintendo has finally seen fit to announce its plans for the DS's wireless online service. The Japanese giant has confirmed that there will be 15,000 Wi-Fi Connection points across Europe when the service launches on 25 November. Amazingly, 7,500 of these will be based in the UK.

Nintendo Europe's senior director of marketing, Jim Merrick, is upbeat about the announcement. "We've been on the sidelines of online gaming for a long time, because we just didn't see the right combination of value for the consumer and technology for gameplay," he admits. "Now I think the time is right. We talked about the promise of Wi-Fi when we first introduced the DS, and now we can show you what Nintendo's vision of online gaming is."

This vision is a little different to what may have been expected. In the US (and soon to be over here) the big N has signed a deal with the big M. Yes, that's right – McDonald's will host Wi-Fi hotspots for Nintendo in over 7,000 restaurants in the States. The fast food monster already offers wireless internet access to laptop owners, but charges a fee. The crucial difference with the Nintendo service supplied by Texan firm, Wayport, is that it will be free of charge.

Reggie Fils-Aime, Nintendo of America's executive VP of sales and marketing (and owner of one of the largest faces in the world), has been waxing lyrical about the Wayport/McDonald's deal. "This agreement with Wayport will bring countless people together to play games in a

"THIS WILL BRING COUNTLESS PEOPLE TOGETHER TO PLAY GAMES IN A SINGLE COMMUNITY"

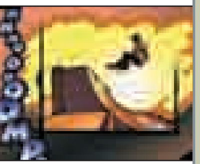
REGGIE FILS-AMIE, NINTENDO OF AMERICA

-SIZE ME

single, simultaneous wireless community," he anticipates. "Beginning with free access at participating McDonald's, we have removed one of the major barriers that has kept people from going online to play games." You have to assume this barrier of which he speaks is that of not having instant access to a cheeseburger at all times. We're pretty sure that's actually part of the constitution.

Still, it all sounds quite healthy (in a gaming sense, at least). It's about time Nintendo entered the online universe, and we're looking forward to having a crack on *Mario Kart* in between slurps of super-sized Sprite. The real proof of the pudding, as always, will be in the eating – and we're not talking about those thermo-nuclear apple pies…

High-speed japes a-plenty with Mario and his karting friends online.



At last, an online version of *Tony Hawk* that's fun to play with your friends…

Bye bye, social life and hello, *Animal Crossing*.

GAME ON

THE GAMES THAT ARE SET TO SHAPE THE NINTENDO DS'S ONLINE FUTURE…

MARIO KART DS

The one that we've all been waiting for. if only for the prospect of online play. The 8-player ad hoc Wi-Fi has already been hammered to within an inch of its life, but there can't be a soul out there who hasn't fancied testing their *Mario Kart* mettle against players from all over the world. Admittedly, the fact that the game only allows for up to four players is a little disappointing but nevertheless, we're eager to go up against some of the 'best' that the United States and Japan have to offer. Just picture the scene: you, sitting at home with your DS in hand, racing against a rotund American who's lounging in the upstairs section of a Maccie D's in Wisconsin. As he goes to take a bite out of his bacon double cheese, you fire off that red shell you had in reserve and fly past him over the finish line. Just picture the sweat on his brow as he hurls his fries at the wall. Fantastic.

TONY HAWK'S AMERICAN SK8LAND

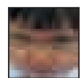
It may feature the most cringe worthy name since *Driv3r* (putting numbers in names is never a good thing, after all), but if this cel-shaded version of the Hawk works as well as it should then it could be a real hit with the hardcore crowd. Hawk has always been a 'pure skill' game with an incredible learning curve catering for everyone from beginners through to grand masters. Thankfully, the handheld version factors all of this skill-based gameplay in perfectly and the result are just what we could have hoped for. It's this type of competitive gaming that's defined the online experience so far, and the DS could certainly do with an injection of hard-edged challenge gameplay when the online service launches. Head to head with the Hawker himself? Sounds all right to us… although we suspect that once he's seen our 'skillz', he'll hightail it for the hills with his skateboard between his legs. The big girl.

ANIMAL CROSSING: WILD WORLD

This is the dark horse that we're more than happy to put our money on; a game that could either redefine online gaming as we know it or, indeed, appeal to such a select few that it sinks without trace. As champions of the GameCube version, we're confident that the latter will not happen – after all, showing off your new house to your friends is one thing, but allowing strangers from anywhere across the world to visit your own little village (and then steal all the fruit and chop down all the trees) is quite another. Imagine the compulsion of the offline mode mixed with beautifully integrated connectivity. Considering what happened last time, we can't see ourselves ever getting anything done again. Ever.

Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



SO SUE ME

Microsoft is that upset about its missing Xbox 360 dev kits that it's threatening a $10 million lawsuit. Several unfinished bits of hardware went missing in Germany, although things have become quite confusing since then. One of the lawsuit's targets, hacker site Smartxx (on which pictures of the stolen equipment recently appeared), claims that Microsoft knew about the four dev kits it had acquired all along, and was even complicit in posting the pictures. Apparently Smartxx was sold its dev kits, but it's still uncertain who actually stole them in the first place.





DIGITAL DOWNFALL

Bill Gates dismissed next-gen DVD formats Blu-Ray and HD-DVD this month. He stated that the future lies in digital distribution, not more complex disc technology. "That's simply the last physical format we'll ever have," he said during a speech at Washington's Howard University. Given that Microsoft controls most of the world's digital distribution capabilities, it's not surprising that he would favour such methods over the state-of-the-art technology rumoured to be used in the PS3.





ARCADE SHOW GIVES US A TASTE OF WHAT'S TO COME…

A SNEAK PREVIEW

Once again, the UK arcade industry got its chance to sample the latest arcade wares at the annual Preview 2006 event held in London's Novotel West hotel recently. Not surprisingly, it was Sega that garnered top honours at an otherwise mixed event for the industry.

By virtue of its huge cabinet, the biggest fixture at the Sega booth was *World Club Championship Football* – adding a European element to the previously Series A-only Panini-backed management sim through the addition of some of Europe's biggest clubs, such as Chelsea, Barcelona and Arsenal. Although the actual gameplay remains largely unchanged, it's still interesting how the game combines an external card-collecting element with the more traditional arcade-style gameplay.

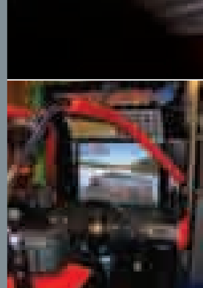
However, the star of the show was *House Of The Dead 4*. Marking the UK debut for the much-vaunted Lindbergh board by being fully playable and translated, Sega's zombie blaster didn't disappoint. Visually, the cabinet's high-definition screen showcased the next-generation console-rivalling power of the Lindbergh board perfectly, impressing with its fantastically detailed levels, good special effects and legions of zombies on screen.

The gameplay is equally excellent, marking a return to form for the series following the rather average third instalment. Consisting of six levels, the perfect balance has been struck between the pace and skill of the first two games. Tedious hostage situations are gone, replaced with your character being grabbed by a zombie and then having to shake your gun vigorously enough to loosen its grip within a time limit, which, together with some excellent bosses and set pieces make *House Of The Dead 4* one of the hottest looking arcade games seen this year.

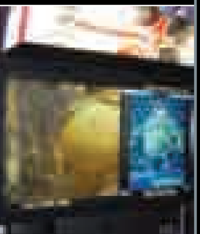
Sega also put *Dinosaur King* on show at the event. The game, based on *Mushi King*, replaces the coleoptera combatants of the immensely popular Japanese game with more prehistoric protagonists in a bid to increase the game's appeal to western kids.

Other than Sega's highlights, however, there was precious little of note. Taito's eye-catching *Battle Gear 4* may have incorporated some nice high-resolution visuals, European marques and the legendary Monaco street circuit, but overall the game element of the show was devoid of anything fresh.

Sammy's Atomiswave board was



Taito's *Battle Gear 4* drew attention away from Sega.



The real show stopper was *House Of The Dead 4*.

represented by ***King Of Fighters XI, NeoGeo Battle Coliseum*** **and token** ***Need For Speed*** **rip-off,** ***Faster Than Speed,*** **while established titles such as** ***OutRun 2 Special Tours, Ghost Force, Initial D Arcade Stage 3*** **and** ***Virtua Striker 4*** **continued to fly the flag for the current-generation hardware.**

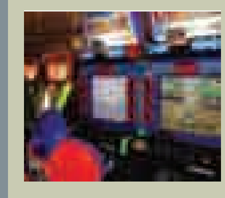
House Of The Dead 4 **aside, the only tangible evidence of Lindbergh's existence were some grainy FMV videos – the majority of which were already widely available on the internet prior to the show – running in the background. It's a shame really, as we already have high hopes for the likes of** ***Afterburner Climax, Virtua Tennis 3*** **and** ***Virtua Fighter 5.***

With the rest of the games on show being the usual collection of hideously poor ***Need For Speed*** **clones and woeful lightgun efforts, the gaming element of the show (easily dwarfed by the gambling presence) didn't inspire on the whole. However, with titles like** ***House Of The Dead 4*** **demonstrating the prowess of next-gen boards, there's plenty to look forward to at the ATEI show at Earl's Court in January.**

"THE STAR OF THE SHOW WAS HOUSE OF THE DEAD 4, IMPRESSING WITH ITS DETAILED LEVELS, GOOD SPECIAL EFFECTS AND LEGIONS OF ZOMBIES"

CARD TRICKS

Arguably the biggest disappointment of the show was Namco's take on classic Nintendo IP, ***Mario Kart Arcade*** **GP. While the Triforce-powered arcade racer still plays every bit as good as it looks (which is pretty damned good), it was confirmed that the final European cabinets would not feature the IC card system. Although data storage cards have become an integral part of the arcade landscape in recent years, the hardware costs involved, both in terms of cabinet prices and maintenance, aren't insignificant. However, with the data storage element a key part of** ***Mario Kart,*** **it is a significant blow to the game's prospects in Europe. As one disgruntled attendee quipped, "What's the bloody point in playing it now?"**



NOT ANOTHER...

REVOLUTION BASHING

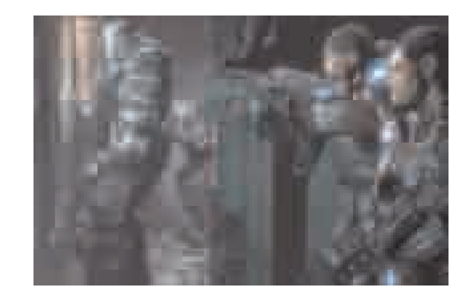
EPIC VP LAUNCHES VERBAL DIATRIBE ON NINTENDO'S LATEST CONTROLLER

Everybody and their dog has an opinion on the Revolution controller. Some say it's going to change the way games are played forever, others are reserving judgement until the games appear (hello!), while some, like Epic VP Mark Rein, have already written it off. It's been so excessively discussed that the damned thing's almost becoming boring months before it's even surfaced in the shops…

Rein decided to use a recent IGN live event as a soapbox for his opinions, and once he got going there was very little anyone could do to stop him. "Don't kid yourself," he began, "you're going to see more gimmicky, crappy, cheap, I-wish-I-hadn't-bought-it gimmick games based around that controller than you could possibly imagine."

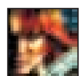
He wasn't finished there though – not by a long shot. "I guarantee you there's going to be lots of people who say the whole reason for this game is this controller, we made the perfect game for the controller," he contends, "and all it'll be is about the controller, and not necessarily a great game."

Something tells us that he doesn't like the Revolution, so his subsequent backtracking and assurance that the Unreal Engine and Revolutionwould got well together smacks of damage limitation. Ultimately though, we want these idle opinions to subside and for the machine (and its games) to emerge, so we can see for ourselves what all the fuss is about.



Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



MORE MORE MOORE

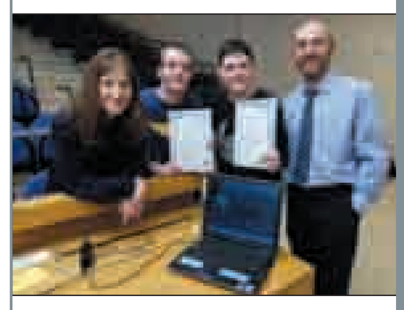
We've been hearing a lot from Microsoft's Peter Moore recently, most of which might be described as 'hot air'. This month he's been defending Rare's *Perfect Dark Zero* from its early critics, and announcing that the outfit has two new titles in production – although no details thereof have yet been released. In discussing the naming of the Xbox 360 and defending the company's dual pricing strategy, he also came out with this marvellous sound bite: "The Xbox 360 is a living entertainment experience powered by human energy." Bless you, Peter.



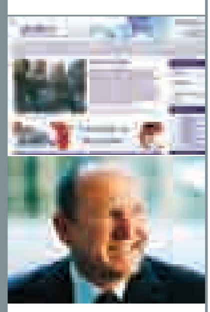


SONY LOVES YOU, BABY

Sony is backing the educational development of the University of Abertay's game development students. Three students were rewarded for their efforts on the console programming course, the second year of which culminates with the creation of a game. Sony provided prizes including cheques, PS2/Linux games dev kits and certificates, while SCEE rep Sarah Ewen made a presentation involving the PS3's new cell architecture and capabilities. Remember these faces – you might be looking at the future of game development…



COMPUTER GAMES DEGREES TO INTRODUCE KITEMARK SCHEME



Ian Livingstone is keen to keep the games industry full of bright young hopefuls.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Skillset, the Sector Skills Council for the audio-visual industries, has announced the introduction of a new Kitemark scheme for degree-level computer games courses, which will guarantee a specific level of quality to students and developers alike. This brand new scheme has been developed through consultation with ELSPA, TIGA, the higher education sector, and Skillset's Computer Games Forum (chaired by Eidos' Ian Livingstone). The forum also includes representatives from key industry players such as Microsoft, Electronic Arts, Sega and Sony, and will work – as with all Kitemark schemes – by evaluating the crucial aspects of production.

In this case, the products are highly skilled games developers, so the courses will be assessed on their programming, art and design standards. Special attention will be given to areas determined as 'key' to success – in this case, programming languages, maths, drawing and communication, among others.

Kate O'Connor, deputy chief executive officer and director of policy and development at Skillset, is extremely focused on what can be achieved with the new Kitemark scheme. "The priority is on key enduring and transferable skills," she insists. "The industry has told us that they want and need graduates who are flexible and able to adapt to new technologies and we have built this accreditation scheme around those core values. We will also ensure that courses that achieve accreditation have a focus on these core technical skills framed within a real-world business context."

Electronic Arts' Richard Leinfeller – who will be acting as an industry evaluator on the scheme – is particularly upbeat about all the possibilities that the scheme will potentially open up for development studios. "Over the years I have seen widely varied content within Computer Games Courses," he comments. "With many students now taking games courses as an entry point into the industry it is important for us to provide guidelines on the types of skills needed to be successful. Being involved in the course evaluation team provides an opportunity to do this. Students will benefit by getting a firm grounding in the pure core disciplines such as computing, maths, science and art, with relevant game-specific components woven in."

With the industry becoming more and more competitive with every day that passes, it is essential for the United Kingdom to keep up. Hopefully, this scheme will raise the bar for programming houses nationwide, leading to better games for us, the consumers.



"IT IS IMPORTANT TO **PROVIDE GUIDELINES** ON THE **SKILLS STUDENTS WILL NEED**"

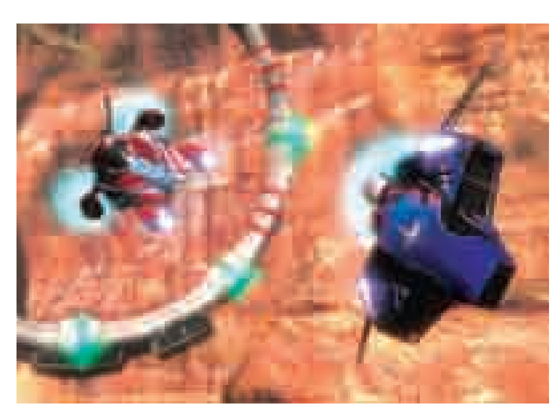


THE CLAIM GAME

MR KUTARAGI'S AT IT AGAIN…

Ken Kutaragi, SCE boss and notorious brag artist has been pimping his PlayStation3 wares once again. This time, he claims that the PS3 will be capable of running games at a phenomenal 120 frames per second and suggests that future televisions will be able to support this frankly absurd refresh rate. Personally, we think it smacks of more 'mine's bigger than yours' talk from Sony's main man; the majority of movies are shot at 24fps, and the difference between 30 and 60fps in a game is near negligible. Why on earth would we need 120fps?

We're more concerned, however, by the announcement that the PlayStation3 will not be offering an Xbox Live-style overarching service for PS3 games. This means publishers will have to create their own servers; we've used EA's. They're not good. This could be very important in the upcoming online gaming battle that is sure to happen over the coming months and years. This, coupled with the news from Sony's Reiko Sakamoto that it'll be, "hard to say if the PlayStation3 will be 100 per cent backwards compatible," has got us slightly worried about the priorities of Kutaragi and friends. We're sure the machine will be an absolute beast when it finally arrives, but we'd like to see if Ken's next bold claim is actually interesting…



Fatal Intertia sounds like an ambitious game… but does it really need to go at 120fps?

games™ THE TOP FIVE

CONSOLE LAUNCH GAMES



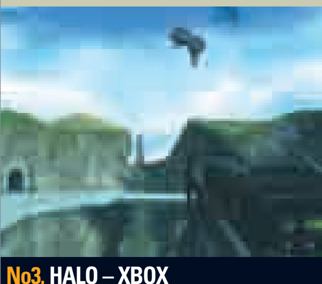
No.5. SONIC – MEGA DRIVE

Act 1 – Green Hill Zone.



No.4. RIDGE RACER – PLAYSTATION

Arcade in my home? Yes, thank you.



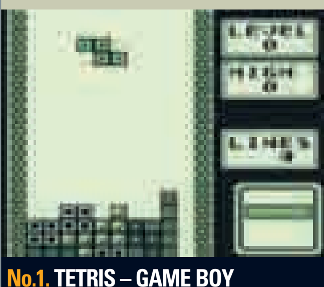
No3. HALO – XBOX

Kept the box going for nearly a year.



No.2. SUPER MARIO 64 – N64

Most influential game? Quite possibly.



No.1. TETRIS – GAME BOY

Streamlined gaming perfection.

GAMES ROOM 101

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING



NO. 39: OUR OWN WORST ENERMY

It happens every time; the second a new console is announced, the hype machine goes into overdrive. Screenshots are bandied around all over the internet. People furiously download every single lo-fi video clip taken from the most recent games expos. Forum threads are awash with crazed fanboy arguments; the very same that plagued the playgrounds of our youths. And when the console finally hits shelves… it's a disappointment. No matter how stunning the games or how much potential the machine has, there's no way it can ever match up to people's over-active imaginations.

The Nintendo Revolution might take this dangerous over hyping to the next level, and not through any fault of its own. Fuelled by a fan base more zealous than any other and marketing itself as 'changing the way videogames will be viewed forever', it's no surprise that even a 'gameless' trailer has sent the videogaming world into a spin. The Revolution certainly has the potential to be anything it wants to be, but be in no doubt that it could also fall flat on its arse quicker than a wonky EyeToy. One thing's for certain – it will never live up to everyone's ridiculous expectations. Maybe that's why we're trying not to have any just yet.



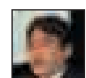
Much of the 360's launch line-up has disappointed.



Nintendo fans can be quite eager, but will it be damaging?

Data Stream

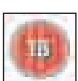
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



GLOBAL REVOLUTION

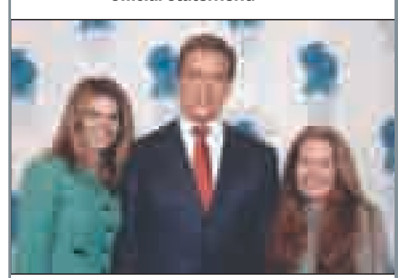
Nintendo is reputedly aiming for a synchronised worldwide launch for the Revolution, so stated Satoru Iwata in a recent Nikkei Business report. "I can only say that it's coming out in 2006, but it will be after the current fiscal year," he announces. "We hope to make it a simultaneous release as much as it's possible." Also of note was the Nintendo president's assertion that the Revolution would sell more than the GameCube's 18.7 million consoles – "[Revolution] would be a complete failure if we didn't sell more units."





CAN I SEE SOME ID?

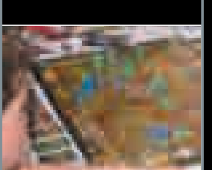
Following in Californian governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's footsteps, the state of Florida has begun taking steps toward restricting the sale of violent videogames to under 18s. The legislation is almost identical to that which Schwarzenegger signed into law last month, introducing a $1,000 fine per offence for retailers. It also requires games to bear a two-inch square '18' sticker. The American Entertainment Software Association will likely take issue with this as it has with other laws of this sort although as yet, the AESA has issued no official statement.



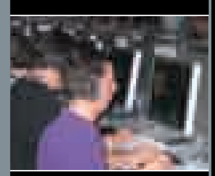


BLIZZARD EVENT TEARS DOWN THE HOUSE

COMING IN FROM THE COLD



The event was as much about the fans enjoying themselves as it was about making announcements.



It wasn't, perhaps, the most usual of gatherings – indeed, any feelings of geekdom felt by ourselves were quickly washed away by the crowd in attendance. Nevertheless, this year's BlizzCon event (the first to be held by popular developer Blizzard Entertainment) was a runaway success with well over 8,000 people all crammed into California's Anaheim Convention Centre, as many dressed in costume – everything from Taurens and Succubi to Night Elves, Warriors and more besides – as not. Like we said, we felt relatively… normal. Well, nearly.

Taking place over 28 and 29 October, filling two large halls within the convention centre and culminating in an evening concert featuring performances by Level 60 Elite Tauren Chieftain (a death metal band formed entirely of Blizzard staff, including president Mike Morhaime on bass) and The Offspring, BlizzCon was far more than just Blizzard blowing its own trumpet. True, it did use the event to piggyback some announcements that were fairly important, at least to players of *World Of Warcraft*, as well as to showcase some of its upcoming titles. *Starcraft Ghost* was fully playable in its multiplayer form – while single-player demonstrations were being given by the game's producer every few hours – and visitors were even privileged to be the first to play *The Burning Crusade*, Blizzard's upcoming expansion for *World Of Warcraft*. Of course, the initial announcement made by lead producer Shane Dabiri was somewhat amusing to us, if only for the typically American reaction of the Azeroth-savvy crowd; cue much whooping and hollering at the mention of linked auction houses and the introduction of jewel crafting.

That said however, it's clear that the event was done primarily as a thank you to the Blizzard community; from the Q&A forums giving insight into the making of its games to the on-site tournaments and even a merchandise store, there was pretty much everything a Blizzard fan could ask for. As a developer-run event, BlizzCon stands as only the second of its kind – the first being id Software's own QuakeCon – so it's incredibly encouraging to see that a developer has the sway and community support to pull such a thing off with this degree of success, even if it did so at an admitted loss. The only thing that remains now is whether Blizzard will make BlizzCon a yearly event or simply use it to coincide with other big announcements; it's a good question, according to Mike Morhaime, but we'll be damned if he gave us an answer…

> "A RUNAWAY SUCCESS – OVER 8,000 PEOPLE CRAMMED IN… AS MANY DRESSED IN COSTUME AS NOT"

Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



BANNING BANDWAGON

Labour MP Keith Vaz spoke out in parliament recently about Rockstar's upcoming title, *Bully*, calling for the government to ban it. It's unsurprising, although as a game that nobody outside Rockstar has even seen, the call to ban it before it's even been previewed, let alone released, is strange. Rockstar said: "We support and admire the groups who are working hard to address the long-standing problem of bullying… [but] just as books aren't judged by their covers, videogames shouldn't be judged by their titles."



NOT VERY SENSIBLE

Codemasters is remaking *Sensible Soccer* in time for the title's 15th anniversary. Original designer Jon Hare will be on hand to ensure that it's not the atrocity that such remakes tend to be. "There is no reason why *Sensible Soccer 2006* can't outsell *FIFA* and *PES*," said Hare – unless, of course, it's both devoid of licensed players, AND rubbish. Further remakes of classic Codemasters IP are also expected, but we'll wait to see how this turns out before throwing our hats in the air.





Jack Thompson is also well known to use selective science in his favour.

RESEARCH THIS

ESA PRESENTS VIOLENT VIDEOGAME STUDY

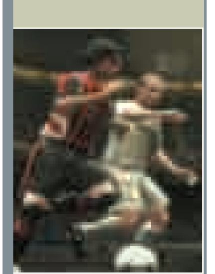
In its latest move to prevent American state governments protecting their children from games they shouldn't be playing, the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) has published research denying links between videogame and real world violence. As well as reproach from outside the videogaming world, the body's flagrant citation of selective scientific study has since attracted criticism from within the industry.

The studies quoted by the ESA include a National Swedish Public Health Institute enquiry into the effects of computer and videogame playing, which revealed, "strong support for computer game playing having positive effects on spatial ability and reaction time." Similar American and British research denies any correlation between violent game playing and excessive violent thoughts and behaviour. This means nothing because anti-videogame activists can present – on demand – similarly selective studies proving that videogames do, in fact, have harmful psychological effect.

games™ remains confused by the ESA's strong objection to the lawful restriction of videogame sales in America. This action goes to prove that the US games industry makes considerable profit from peddling violent and otherwise immoral content to children – surely a practice to be discouraged from both an ethical and a professional point of view. Such unconcerned bandying of scientific fact also does little to bolster the trade body's credibility.

THAT'S SHOW BUSINESS

SPIELBERG SIGNED UP BY ELECTRONIC ARTS



The deal represents important new IP for EA, which makes most of its money from licences such as *FIFA*.

Electronic Arts has not only acquired the *Simpsons* licence this month, it's also signed movie master Steven Spielberg to work at its LA studio over a period of several years. He is to supervise the development of three brand new franchises and although EA will own the intellectual property, Spielberg will have the right to make the games into films. "Having watched the game industry grow from a niche to a major creative force in entertainment, I have a great deal of respect for EA's understanding of the interactive format," stated the director in an official announcement.

Far from trying to bridge the gap between film and game, as *King Kong* tries so hard to do, Spielberg's efforts will be more than interactive movies. "[Spielberg] shares our vision for the potential of the medium and has the passion and creativity to help us deliver a game that can not only engage and compel you with its interactivity, but move you emotionally," says EALA studio head Neil Young in a far from typical EA statement. We await Spielberg's first interactive project.



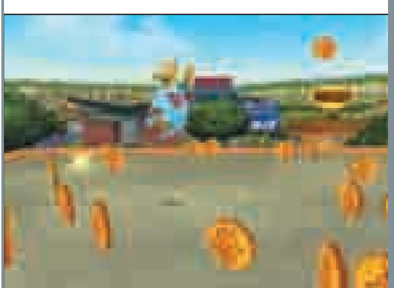
Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



MMM… SELLING OUT TO EA

Vivendi Universal has been dropped as the publisher of *Simpsons*-based games in favour of Electronic Arts which, along with its new Spielberg projects, makes this an extremely good month for the publishing giant in terms of acquiring new licences. A next-gen *Simpsons* title is reportedly already under way. This deal is of particular interest because the might of EA could persuade Fox to licence out some of its other extremely successful television shows for use in videogames, which could be rather promising. Unless it made 'Family Guy Kart Racing' of course. That would certainly break us.

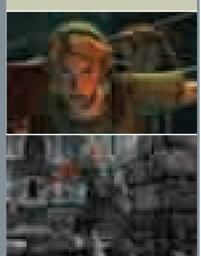


TWILIGHT PRINCESS WILL DEFINITELY APPEAR ON GAMECUBE



No need for impatience – the game will be here soon enough. Oh yes, it will.

THE MISSING LINK



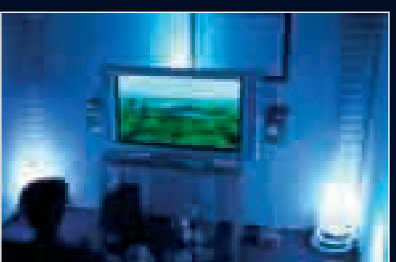
Despite rumours to the contrary, Nintendo has confirmed that the eagerly anticipated *Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess* will still be appearing on the GameCube.

When the game did not appear on Nintendo's Q1 release schedule, rumours began circulating that *Zelda* was to be held back and released as a Revolution launch title. However, the big N's UK PR manager, Rob Saunders, has quashed these claims, stating that, "Nintendo has always said that *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* will appear on Nintendo GameCube and this is still very much the case."

It seems a sensible ploy for Nintendo to hold back its killer IP until the launch of the new console. It will effectively 'bridge the gap' between the two machines, acting as the last ever game on the GameCube, but also allowing Nintendo to launch a new console with one of its strongest properties – something it failed to do with the Cube.

However, the bottom line is simple: as long as we get to play it, we don't care what machine it comes out on. Just hurry up and get the damn thing finished. Please.





The technology adapts according to what kind of image appears on-screen.

LIGHT OF YOUR LIFE

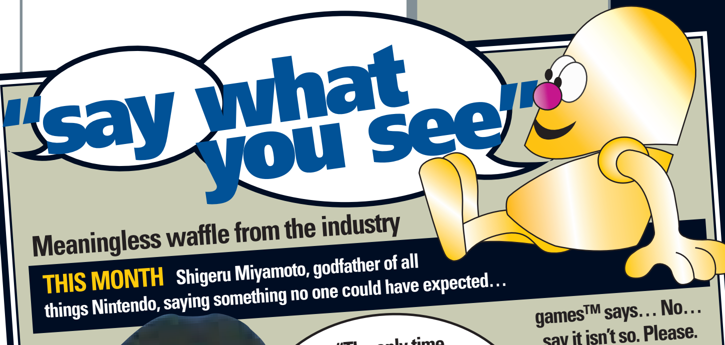
PHILIPS ANNOUNCES NEXT GENERATION OF AMBIENT AUDIO-VISUAL EXPERIENCE

Once, during a game of *SSX* we found ourselves drawn into the game more than usual. It seemed more 'real', far more immersive than normal. It turned out that someone had left the desk fan on and it was blowing in our faces. Okay, so we're stupid… but that doesn't mean that it wasn't affecting.

However, Philips must be running secret surveillance on our *SSX* sessions, as it has come up with the next step in ultimate home cinema, and it's suspiciously similar. The new technology named amBX is a veritable Imax cinema in your own lounge, incorporating LED lights that match the action on screen (creating an ambient hue on the wall), fans, heaters and even active furniture to drag you into the game world head first.

As we finally get our hands on the next generation of gaming technology, it's good to see that the television companies aren't resting on their laurels. Quite who would be prepared to convert their entire lounge into this phenomenal gaming set-up, we're not sure, but the technology can't be sniffed at – mainly because Philips hasn't included that as an option yet.

> "THE TECHNOLOGY IS A VERITABLE IMAX CINEMA IN YOUR OWN LOUNGE"




eMag

LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE

"SOMETHING WAS WRONG FROM THE OFF. THERE WAS NO EXCITED BOOTH, JUST THAT NICE WHITE CONTROLLER STICKING OUT INTO



So, just how excited is the rest of the world about the advent of the Xbox 360?

When a story emerged about the controllers on the 360 demo booths interfering with the cash registers at Walmart, my first thought was, "They have Xbox 360 demo pods at Walmart?" So, a few weeks before launch I got myself down there quick smart, as much to gauge the man-on-the-street response as to play great games in breathtaking high definition. What followed was the very essence of anticlimax.

Something was wrong from the off. Even though the store was busy (I've never seen it otherwise) there was no excited little circle of gazers around the booth; no one at all, in fact. Just that nice white controller sticking out into the aisle on the end of a rubber arm, the screen unwatched above. Half expecting the pad to be a disconnected dummy after the cash register story, I gave it a prod and was happy to find it was not.

Walmart's demo stations are aggressively uncomfortable, presumably to keep people like me from hogging them all day. The screen is positioned directly above the controller but three feet higher and angled down at 45 degrees, an ergonomic nightmare giving you the posture of someone awaiting communication from God. It hurts after three minutes, but I stuck it out for 35. Not once did anybody queue up behind me in the accepted 'I'd like a go' formation.

There were many rolling demos to choose from, but only three were playable: *King Kong, Call Of Duty 2* and *Kameo*. Regardless of Walmart's hopelessly mis-calibrated 20-inch LCD widescreen, there was no ounce of 'wow' to the experience. *Call Of Duty 2* was the usual linear theme park ride for people who don't like to think for themselves (512Mb of RAM and I'm still being guided from one point on an event path to the next in a little arcade village that cannot be explored?); *King Kong* had sharper textures but that limited set-piece to set-piece gameplay that typifies the old machines it was designed for; and *Kameo* would be insignificant on any format.

Soldiering on with the rolling demo of *Test Drive Unlimited*, a young couple finally came by and showed an interest.

"Hey, that's the new Xbox," said the guy.

"Is that good?" asked his other half.

"Well, it's like $500," he said, demonstrating why Microsoft should have advertised this thing, educating the consumer of its price at least. As a yellow-clad motorbike rider sped past on a yellow bike, the girl asked, "Is this *Kill Bill*?" to which her boyfriend replied, "It's probably *Project Gotham*. That's just a cut-scene, though."

Seeing that I might finally have some ordinary American consumers who fit snugly inside the 360's demographic, and not wanting to be the kind of demo hog I hate, I offered them the controller, but was rebuffed.

"Nah, that's okay," said the man, "but is there anything you can play? It's all good in the cut-scenes, but you can't tell till you see the actual game."



CIRCLE OF GAZERS AROUND THE THE AISLE ON A RUBBER ARM"

I groped desperately through the menu, not wishing to revisit the hell of the previous games, and found *Ghost Recon 3*. A trailer that's been on the internet for months. Damn it. So back to *COD2* it was.

"I just want to see it in game," qualified the gent. "To spend that kind of money it's got to look good. I'm not gonna spend 500 bucks just to play Xbox with a wireless controller."

Up came the game, which I was better able to demonstrate having already become familiar with the eccentricities of its controls.

"It's not as smooth as you'd think," the girlfriend remarked.

"And still jaggy," noted the man, pointing out the ragged frame of a jeep's windshield and the barrel of my rifle. Before long, he nonchalantly announced, "I'm not gonna get it," and they left quietly in search of whatever had brought them to Walmart in the first place.

Besides the lovely feel of the new controller, there was nothing admirable about the whole thing, and Walmart's war on my neck finally ended in their favour. As I stepped away, there was still nobody watching or waiting. The demo pods to my left, running *Zatchbell* on the GameCube and *Nintendogs* on the DS, remained populated by a party of kids as they had been when I arrived.

Many thanks



MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

Maharishi



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

StewMac

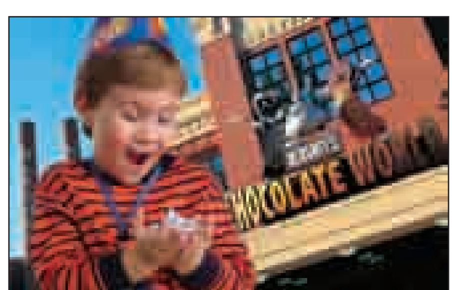


GOT ANY QUESTIONS FOR THE SHAPE? THEN JUST DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net YOU MIGHT GET A REPLY… OR POSSIBLY JUST THE FINGER

AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

HERSHEY'S TAKE 5



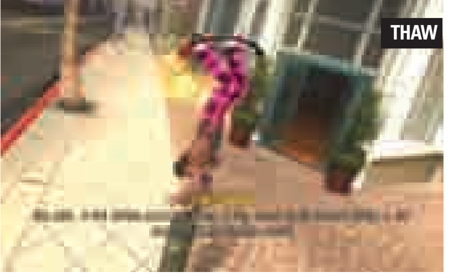
It's a matter of historical record that Hershey's chocolate tastes of disinfectant, with a little bit of sick. But pour that chocolate on top of whole pretzels, peanuts and caramel, pumping any free space full of peanut butter, and you have yourself a taste sensation known as Take 5… because that's how many you should eat per sitting.

US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Star Wars Battlefront II	Activision	Xbox
2	Star Wars Battlefront II	Activision	PS2
3	Resident Evil 4	Capcom	PS2
4	Star Wars Battlefront II	Activision	PSP
5	Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	EA Games	Xbox
6	GTA: Liberty City Stories	Rockstar	PSP
7	Soul Calibur III	Namco	PS2
8	Ratchet: Deadlocked	SCEA	PS2
9	Halo 2	Microsoft	Xbox
10	Tony Hawk's American Wasteland	Activision	Xbox

(Updated 15/11/05)


GTA: Liberty City Stories


THAW

KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

"BRAIN TRAINING IS EXACTLY THE KIND OF THING NINTENDO IS REVOLUTION – IT'S A GAME THAT'S NOT ABOUT KILLING BOSSES

■ It's only a picture and yet our brains already hurt…



The Japanese have historically preferred to keep their games machines as games machines and their PCs as PCs. In a country where cellular phones are also address books, alarm clocks, email processors and games machines, the idea of a devoted PDA is silly. Certainly, you can buy one… you're just going to look silly carrying it around. They make actual computers in Japan that are themselves only a little bigger than a PDA.

Recently though, the Nintendo DS has thrived on productivity software. The champion of the game-like productivity software genre – a genre we might simply call 'games with inscrutable purpose' – is a title that goes by the nickname

§. The nickname is necessary because the game's title is longer than this sentence used to describe how long the game's title is. It lists the name of the Touhoku University professor who sculpted the concept, as well as the purpose of the software. The purpose – and it's very scientific – is to exercise your brain every day through a series of simple maths problems. For example, the screen will ask you, "2 + 4 – 3," and you input the answer, "3," as quickly as you can. The game progresses at a brisk pace and at the end of a test it tells you your score in terms of the age of your brain. The challenges get progressively harder, and there are more complicated tests such as pictorial maths puzzles (say, you'll see five little chickens, a plus sign, and 12 little stars) and logic sequence problems – basically, the lowest level IQ test stuff. The emphasis is on speed, and on using the logical parts of your brain regularly in a doctor-approved effort to work against Alzheimer's.

With the testimonials of many Japanese celebrities including Shigesato Itoi famed writer, television personality, and producer/director of *Earthbound*, *Brain Training* became a bizarrely huge hit. It spawned some imitators, one of which has sold almost as well as *Brain Training* itself. The odd thing about the game's success is that it keeps appearing at the top of the retail charts, poking its nose into the top five, then the top three, then dropping down to seven and then coming back up. This has been going on for about six months. Japanese games publishers are baffled by what might be an honest-to-goodness evergreen product in the videogame market – normally something like *Dynasty Warriors* takes the top position for a week or two and then drops completely out of sight. Chart compilers reached an agreement that if *Brain Training* kept up its erratic behaviour, they'd drop it from the charts, considering it 'a different market'.

Brain Training is the exact kind of thing Nintendo promises to do with the Revolution – it's a game that's not about killing bosses, nor is it a meta-game about petting a puppy. It's about you and your brain. It forsakes all the DS's buttons, requiring you to turn the system on its side like a notebook; you use the touch-



PROMISING TO DO WITH THE OR PETTING A META-PUPPY"

pad to write the answers to the simple mathematical problems. Last night, a woman in her late 50s was sitting next to me on the Ginza Line on the way home from work, and she was holding her DS sideways. Without having to glance at the screen, I knew what she was playing. Nintendo is making a killing on polished metal DS attaché cases. These little accessories that you plug into the DS's Game Boy Advance cartridge slot, which serve as carrying cases for collapsible styluses or screen wipes, are selling like hotcakes to old men and women who don't realise you can use that slot to play *Advance Wars 2* – which they don't play because a lot of them have *Advance Wars Dual Strike*. This means that these people are kind of starting to buy games. Nintendo really is proving that if pressing buttons is for kids, using a stylus is for old people and kids.

Kind regards



TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON 39: BEING A BADASS AT... A JAPANESE BAR (WORKS BEST WITH A COOL DEMEANOR, ON EXPENSIVE WHISKEY, AT A JAZZ BAR):

Oi, gaason.	Hey, garçon.
Aa, hai.	Yes, sir.
Kono dechiagetakusai uisuki wa ittai, doko kara kitano? Danbooru ka?	What the hell did you pour this pissy whiskey out of? A cardboard box?
Oren nichiyoubi no hiru no jama sunjaneeyo. Fuzaketeru, omaetachi.	Of all the things you could do to a man on a Sunday afternoon. You must think this is hilarious.
Kane kaeseyo. Mou.	I want my money back. Damn it.

AND THEN SOMETHING WONDERFUL HAPPENED…

On 27 October Sega released a *Brain Training* clone on PSP. I use the word 'clone' literally – it's by the exact same team as the *DS Brain Training* and it has the same title only with the DS replaced with PSP. Obviously, being on PSP means it lacks the awesome handwriting recognition of its DS counterpart – instead opting for a multiple-choice format. Basically, you pick one of four choices assigned to the PSP's four buttons arranged in a diamond on the right side of that luxurious wide screen. In its first week, the game sold 45,857 copies, beating the DS version which sold 22,257. Many had cited the *DS Brain Training* as the secret weapon in winning the handheld war; now the PSP version proves that many people who own PSPs don't object to doing something other than watching *Once Upon A Time In Mexico* or playing *Ridge Racer*. The question of whether *Brain Training* will sell PSP consoles has been answered by analysts with an emphatic, "Whatever," in recent weeks. It'll be interesting, nonetheless, to watch the two *Brains* battle it out on the Famitsu charts these next couple of… years.

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Daito Giken Pachinko Slot	Daito Giken	PS2
2	Daredemo Asobi Taizen	Nintendo	DS
3	Beat Down: Fists Of Vengeance	Capcom	PS2
4	Shadow Of The Colossus	SCEJ	PS2
5	DS Training For Adults: WYB	Nintendo	DS
6	Tamagotchi Connection: CS	Bandai	DS
7	Gentle Brain Exercises	Nintendo	DS
8	Brain Trainer Portable	Sega	PSP
9	Pokémon Torouze	Nintendo	DS
10	Dragon Ball Z Sparking!	Bandai	PS2

(Week ending 06/11/05 © 2005 Media Create Co. Ltd. All Rights Reserved)



Beat Down: Fists Of Vengeance

Shadow Of The Colossus



THE PEOPLE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY TELL IT LIKE IT IS…

FROM THE FRONT

BIOWARE AND PANDEMIC JOIN FORCES, SCI ATTRACTS BIDDERS AND ATARI BRINGS THE EAST TO EUROPE…

A LOT OF LOVE IN THE ROOM…



It isn't uncommon to see topics on internet gaming forums degenerate into arguments where the topic is forgotten in favour of trading insults. Xbox Live users often complain of having to suffer the bleating of immature gamers with no social skills accusing them of cheating.

Conflict and aggression seem to surround the culture of videogames as much as the content of the games. So it was with trepidation of such behaviour that I attended a recent True Playerz gaming tournament in London. I needn't have worried. The competitive element was present but an unspoken mutual respect among attendees eclipsed this.

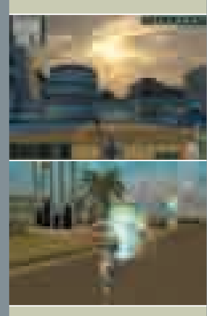
Halo and *Battlefield* tournaments were held, yet nobody threw a tantrum or called anyone a cheap camper. In fact, every tournament ended with a smile and a handshake. Strangers met over a game of *FIFA* and parted as friends. Gamertags were traded and, I've no doubt, great gaming alliances were formed. I enjoyed speaking with people on precisely the same wavelength as me when it came to their attitude toward games and found the social aspects of the day just as rewarding as the gaming.

Why is it that gamers can behave as such fine sportsmen in one environment and as hooligans in another? I've even wondered if any of those present on that day also masquerade as one of those ill-mannered internet forum members.

The difference is respect. These players have respect for their rivals – even in defeat. For some of us, it's enough just to watch good gameplay because we respect the skill of the player. I'd encourage any gamer to attend a gaming tournament like this in the future. It reminded this jaded gamer just how fantastic our pastime can be when we all get along.

We met up with Mr X at True Playerz – he's not nearly as jaded as we expected. Or as ugly.

BIOWARE AND PANDEMIC COME TOGETHER



Elevation intends to get those creative juices flowing.

ELEVATED IDEAS

Canadian development studio BioWare, of *Baldur's Gate*, *Jade Empire* and *Knights Of The Old Republic* fame, is set to merge with Pandemic, creator of *Destroy All Humans!* and *Mercenaries* to form a 'super developer studio'. The landmark deal, worth a reported $300 million, is being masterminded by Elevation Partners, the private equity firm headed by former Electronic Arts president John Riccitiello.

Elevation is a relatively new entertainment venture capital fund, which boasts around $2 billion available to spend on entertainment and media ventures. The new business operation will consist of a holding company, called BioWare/Pandemic Studios (obviously the creativity is reserved for making the games, then), with Riccitiello as CEO. The current heads of BioWare (Greg Zeschuk and Ray Muzyka) and Pandemic (Andrew Goldman and Josh Resnick) will work as senior executives.

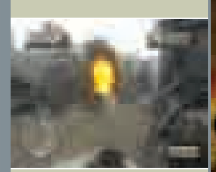
Unsurprisingly, the deal will not put any jobs in jeopardy and all of the firms' existing studios will remain in operation – good news for those out posted in Brisbane and Edmonton, then.

Elevation does not plan to turn BioWare/Pandemic into a publisher, but wants to allow the company free rein to work with existing partners such as THQ and Microsoft. "BioWare and Pandemic will use our new alliance as a launch pad for exchanging creative ideas, cutting edge technologies and top talent while retaining our distinctive cultures," said Ray Muzyka, joint CEO of BioWare Corp. "In a business where developers often must sell out to survive, this deal is refreshingly new: a partnership of equals."

This deal comes just six months after Elevation's failed bid to acquire UK publisher Eidos, where the firm lost out to rival bidder SCi – now, itself, the focus of a potential acquisition (see below).

"ELEVATION CAN BOAST $2 BILLION AVAILABLE TO SPEND ON NEW VENTURES"

SCI COURTED BY TWO POTENTIAL BUYERS



SCi is attempting to breathe new life into *Tomb Raider*.



So, which mystery bidders have got their eyes on *SCi*?

TAKE ME OUT

Surprising news concerning SCi emerged this month; having itself bought Eidos this year, the UK publisher has been approached by a number of undisclosed bidders all vying to buy the company.

Since May, when SCi acquired Eidos, the publisher has received two offers, although one has not been followed up since June. The second offer, however, was received in the last week of October and appears promising, as talks are now underway between the two companies.

The story broke when the *Daily Mail* and *Financial Times* reported that the combined SCi/Eidos entity was a likely target for acquisition. The *Mail* speculated that Electronic Arts and Midway were the potential buyers, although this information remains unconfirmed. SCi's stock rose by 28% following news of its potential acquisition, but it is not yet clear whether it will be backed with a clear-cut offer from the remaining interested party.

With EA already keeping half an eye on Ubisoft as we reported last month, it seems likely that it may also be looking around the rest of Europe for potential acquisitions. The *Tomb Raider* and *Championship Manager* IPs, which formerly belonged to Eidos, are still valuable and SCi has stated, once again, its intentions to return Eidos to profitability within the next financial year.



RAISE YOUR HANDS

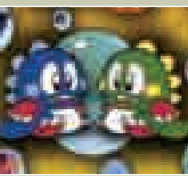
ATARI TO DISTRIBUTE RISING STAR GAMES

Atari has recently confirmed that it will be aiding new publisher Rising Star Games by distributing its titles in Europe. Rising Star is a collaborative effort from Marvelous Interactive Inc. and Nintendo distributor Bergsala AB, formed with the intention of bringing more unique Japanese titles to PAL territories. As yet, no one has made an offer to help distribute the games in Australasia, the other PAL territory.

Among the first titles that Atari is to publish are, fittingly enough, *Space Invaders: Evolution* for the PlayStation Portable and *Rainbow Islands: Revolution* on the Nintendo DS. Alongside these titles are *Bubble Bobble Revolution* and *Evolution* for the Nintendo DS and PlayStation Portable respectively, as well as *Swords Of Destiny*, a PlayStation2 hack 'n' slash game. Others will follow after February 2006.

Atari Europe president Jean-Michel Perbet says, "Working with Rising Star presented us with an exciting opportunity to bring a wealth of appealing titles to the European market." It certainly would be nice to get something appealing from Atari, wouldn't it?

"RISING STAR INTENDS TO BRING UNIQUE JAPANESE TITLES TO PAL TERRITORIES"



If Japan continues to extend its reach, soon the whole world will be playing *Bubble Bobble*.

UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	WWE Smackdown! Vs RAW 2006	THQ	PS2
2	Star Wars Battlefront II	Activision	Multi
3	FIFA '06	EA Sports	Multi
4	GTA: Liberty City Stories	Rockstar Games	PSP
5	Pro Evolution Soccer 5	Konami	Multi
6	Harry Potter: Goblet Of Fire	EA Games	Multi
7	The Sims 2	EA Games	Multi
8	Resident Evil 4	Capcom	Multi
9	The Matrix: Path Of Neo	Atari	Multi
10	The Warriors	Rockstar Games	Multi

New *Grand Theft Auto* and *WWE* titles do extremely well to penetrate a sea of cross-platform releases while *FIFA* continues to outsell *Pro Evo*. Will people never learn?

All information is compiled by ChartTrack and is the strict copyright of Elspa (UK) Ltd. UK Entertainment Software Sales Charts (Full Price, All Formats) (w/e 12 November 2005)



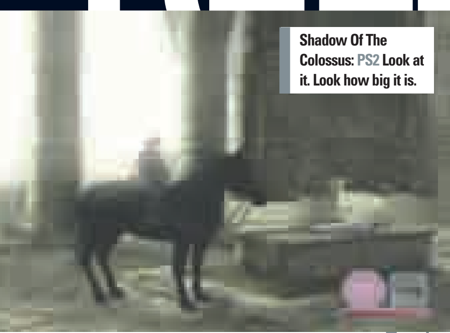
Star Wars Battlefront II

GTA: Liberty City Stories



Resident Evil 4

RELEASE LISTS



Shadow Of The Colossus: PS2 Look at it. Look how big it is.



Splinter Cell 4: Multi At least we spelled 'knife' right this time…

Daxter: PSP Now you get to play as the annoying rodent. Yes.

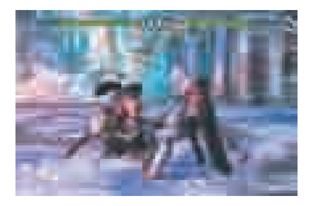


MOST PLAYED

SOUL CALIBUR III

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Sony

When a game allows you to pit the same two characters against one another until four in the morning without getting bored, you know it's doing something right. The tale of soul and sword is retold once more in a manner befitting of a series of this calibre (no pun intended… honest).



CALL OF DUTY 2

Format: Multiformat
Publisher: Activision

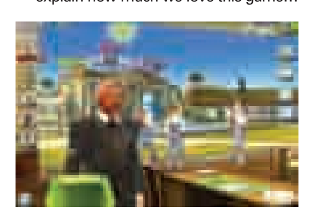
While its single-player might be a bit over-scripted, finding fault with *Call Of Duty 2's* multiplayer modes is a much harder task. Team-based objectives have drawn our attention away from *Battlefield 2* – this in itself is the highest form of praise we can bestow upon Infinity Ward's shooter.



THE MOVIES

Format: PC
Publisher: Activision

Even more love for Activision this month (without even thinking about how long we spent with *THAW* and *Battlefront II*) as we waste most every lunchtime working on virtual films and building up All The Awesome Studios to be the world leader in cinema technology. God, we can't even explain how much we love this game…



PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
DECEMBER '05			
02 December	Flow: Urban Dance Uprising	Ubisoft	
TBC	Prince Of Persia: The Two Thrones	Ubisoft	Wanted
Q4 '05			
TBC	Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows	Midway	
JANUARY '06			
TBC	Jacked	Xplosiv	
FEBRUARY '06			
10 February	Dynasty Warriors 5: Xtreme Legends	Koei	
TBC	Shadow Of The Colossus	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Dragon Quest VIII	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Urban Reign	Sony	
TBC	TOCA Race Driver 3	Codemasters	
TBC	Driver: Parallel Lines	Atari	
TBC	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter	Ubisoft	
Q1 '06			
TBC	Battlestations: Midway	Eidos	
TBC	Commandos Strike Force	SCi	
TBC	The Godfather	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Ghost Recon 3: Advanced Warfighter	Ubisoft	
TBC	Bully	Rockstar	
TBC	24: The Game	Sony	
TBC	Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers	THQ	
TBC 2006			
TBC	Final Fantasy XII	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Okami	Capcom	
TBC	We Love Katamari	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	Devil May Cry 3: Special Edition	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Pro Evolution Soccer Management	Konami	
TBC	Kingdom Hearts 2	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence	Konami	Wanted
TBC	Onimusha: Dawn Of Dreams	Capcom	
TBC	Devil Kings	Capcom	
TBC	Black	Electronic Arts	Wanted



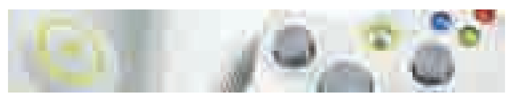
GAMECUBE

Month	Title	Publisher	
DECEMBER '05			
02 December	True Crime: New York City	Activision	
09 December	Battalion Wars	Nintendo	
TBC	Prince Of Persia: The Two Thrones	Ubisoft	Wanted
Q4 '05			
TBC	Nintendo Puzzle Collection	Nintendo	
JANUARY '06			
TBC	Chibi Robo	Nintendo	
FEBRUARY '06			
TBC	Giftpia	Nintendo	Wanted
Q1 '06			
TBC	The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC 2006			
TBC	Chaos Field	TBC	
TBC	Odama	Nintendo	
TBC	Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble	Capcom	



XBOX

Month	Title	Publisher	
DECEMBER '05			
02 December	True Crime: New York City	Activision	
TBC	Prince Of Persia: The Two Thrones	Ubisoft	Wanted
Q4 '05			
TBC	Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows	Midway	
JANUARY '06			
TBC	Painkiller	Koch Media	Wanted
TBC	Jacked	Xplosiv	
TBC	Black	Electronic Arts	Wanted
FEBRUARY '06			
TBC	Driver: Parallel Lines	Atari	
TBC	Stubbs The Zombie In 'Rebel Without A Pulse'	THQ	
TBC	TOCA Race Driver 3	Codemasters	
TBC	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter	Ubisoft	
Q1 '06			
TBC	The Godfather	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Castlevania: Curse Of Darkness	Konami	
TBC	Commandos Strike Force	SCi	
TBC	Bully	Rockstar	
TBC	American McGee Presents: Bad Day LA	Enlight	Wanted
TBC	Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers	THQ	
TBC	Ghost Recon 3: Advanced Warfighter	Ubisoft	
TBC 2006			
TBC	TimeShift	Atari	Wanted



XBOX 360

Month	Title	Publisher	
DECEMBER '05			
02 December	Condemned: Criminal Origins	Sega	
02 December	Perfect Dark Zero	Microsoft	Wanted
02 December	Project Gotham Racing 3	Microsoft	
02 December	Call Of Duty 2	Activision	Wanted
02 December	Kameo: Elements Of Power	Microsoft	
02 December	Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES



The Matrix: Path Of Neo: Multi Whoa.

Perfect Dark Zero: Xbox 360 Putting Joanna through her next-gen paces.

MGS 4: Guns Of The Patriots: PS3 Snake sneaks onto the gaming horizon.

Peter Jackson's King Kong: Multi Talking 'bout the big monkey man…

02 December	Need For Speed Most Wanted	Electronic Arts	
02 December	Dead Or Alive 4: Dead Rising	Microsoft	
02 December	Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	Take2	Wanted
Q4 '05			Wanted
TBC	Frame City Killer	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Top Spin 2	Take2	
JANUARY '06			
TBC	FIFA 2006	Electronic Arts	
FEBRUARY '06			
TBC	Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter	Ubisoft	
Q1 '06			
TBC	The Godfather	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Ridge Racer 6	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Ghost Recon 3: Advanced Warfighter	Ubisoft	
TBC 2006			
TBC	Dead Rising	Capcom	
TBC	Test Drive Unlimited	Atari	Wanted
TBC	Full Auto	Sega	
TBC	Final Fantasy XI	Sega	



PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
DECEMBER '05			
TBC	Prince Of Persia: The Two Thrones	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	Take2	Wanted
Q4 '05			
TBC	Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows	Midway	
TBC	Rise And Fall: Civilisations At War	Midway	Wanted
JANUARY '06			
TBC	Heroes Of Might And Magic V	Ubisoft	
TBC	TimeShift	Atari	
FEBRUARY '06			
TBC	Crashday	Atari	Wanted
TBC	TOCA Race Driver 3	Codemasters	
TBC	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter	Ubisoft	
TBC	Tycoon City: New York	Atari	
TBC	Stubbs The Zombie In 'Rebel Without A Pulse'	THQ	
Q1 '06			
TBC	American McGee Presents: Bad Day LA	Enlight	Wanted
TBC	Lord Of The Rings: Battle For Middle Earth II	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	Auto Assault	NCSoft	
TBC	The Godfather	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers	THQ	
TBC	Ghost Recon 3: Advanced Warfighter	Ubisoft	
TBC	Battlestations Midway	Eidos	
TBC 2006			
TBC	Titan Quest	THQ	

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Month	Title	Publisher	
DECEMBER '05			
02 December	Dynasty Warriors Advance	Koei	
09 December	Alien Hominid	TBC	Wanted
09 December	Dogz	Ubisoft	
09 December	Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	
TBC	Mario Tennis Power Tour	Nintendo	
Q4 '05			
TBC	Age Of Empires: The Age Of Kings	Majesco	

PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

Month	Title	Publisher	
DECEMBER '05			
02 December	Lord Of The Rings Tactics	Electronic Arts	
09 December	Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	
16 December	The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	Wanted
Q4 '05			
TBC	Dead To Rights: Reckoning	Electronic Arts	
JANUARY '06			
TBC	Infected	Majesco	
FEBRUARY '06			
TBC	Lemmings	Sony	
Q1 '06			
TBC	The Godfather	Electronic Arts	
TBC	NBA Ballers	Midway	
TBC 2006			
TBC	Monster Hunter Portable	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble	Capcom	
TBC	Gran Turismo 4 Mobile	Sony	Wanted

NINTENDO DS

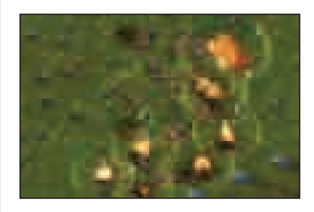
Month	Title	Publisher	
DECEMBER '05			
02 December	Battles Of Prince Of Persia	Ubisoft	
09 December	Peter Jackson's King Kong	Ubisoft	
09 December	Burnout Legends	Electronic Arts	
Q4 '05			
TBC	Mario Kart DS	Nintendo	Wanted
JANUARY '06			
TBC	Electroplankton	Nintendo	Wanted
FEBRUARY '06			
TBC	Metroid Prime Pinball	Nintendo	
Q1 '06			
TBC	New Super Mario Bros.	Nintendo	
05 March	Animal Crossing: Wild World	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC 2006			
TBC	Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Pokémon Diamond/Pearl	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Viewtiful Joe: Double Trouble	Capcom	

PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. Which is completely beyond our control, so don't go giving us evils.



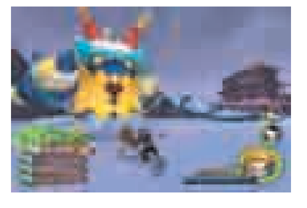
SUPREME COMMANDER

Format: PC
Publisher: THQ
While millions clamour around the Blizzard RTS titles and Westwood's *Command & Conquer* series, we're quite content to back the underdog. Or, in this case the Cavedog. *Total Annihilation* remains a house favourite in terms of PC strategy games so the pressure is on this long-awaited sequel to be silly good.



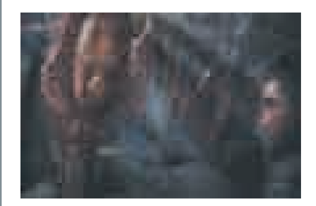
KINGDOM HEARTS II

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Sony
While Square Enix's Disney collaboration has seemingly taken up residence on the 'TBC' section of the list, we hope the dance we just made up will get the game done quicker. Promising to improve on the original and set a new standard for PS2 visuals, Mickey and pals want to hurry up.



ALONE IN THE DARK

Format: Xbox 360
Publisher: Atari
Having pioneered the survival horror genre only for Capcom and Konami to borrow the concept and make much more money, Atari's looking to return the favour by making a new *Alone In The Dark* game that sounds suspiciously similar gameplay-wise to Resident Evil 4. Not that that could ever be considered a bad thing.



a split decision

A carefully planned launch, a solid line-up of games and plenty of demand... has Microsoft finally got it all right?

Three billion dollars. It's an awful lot of money, even if you're a company as financially blessed as Microsoft, but when you're developing a machine that will make a monumental bound in the evolution of gaming, it's the price that has to be paid. Money well spent? It's a question that's going to be thrown around a fair bit until the 360 manages to prove its abilities, and Microsoft has already been the subject of a rather biased episode of *The Money Programme*, but if you manage to gaze through the veil of negativity that programmes such as this are creating, it's easy to see that the coin in question has been put to good use – and it turns out that we're the ones that will be reaping the benefits in the near future.

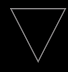
Before you even look at the heaving list of specs and abilities that the Xbox 360 has, the thing that's certainly the most tempting is that you can have this technology today, right now. While Nintendo and Sony's next-gen offerings are still only faint blips on the radar, Microsoft has stepped up to the mark and delivered the technology and performance that will be available in the future, now. "Coming out at the time, and in the way that the 360 has done is a good thing," Jay Filmer, *X360* magazine's deputy editor says. "Unlike the Dreamcast, which came off the back of a previous failed console, the Xbox 360 is following the popular Xbox. People trust the brand; no one trusted Sega, as it was obvious that it only had a limited amount of spending muscle. With all the money it has, people trust that Microsoft isn't going to turn third party. People realise the company is rich and will continue to throw money at the 360 until it gets it right."

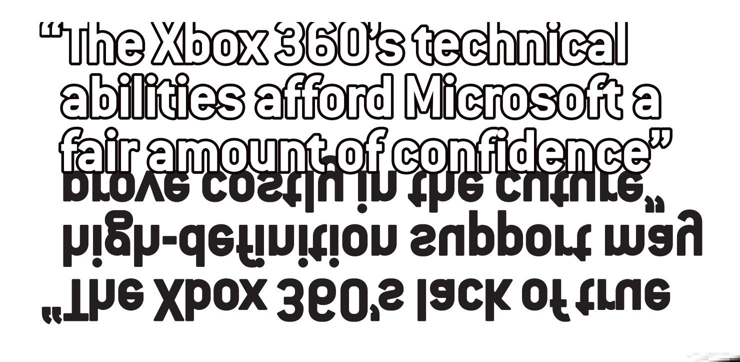
split decision

A rushed launch, a rather lacklustre line-up of games and far too much demand... Is Microsoft getting it all wrong?

Three billion dollars. It's an awful lot of money, even if you're a company as financially blessed as Microsoft, and yet that's how much the Xbox 360 has already cost in development alone. Not content with failing to make anything near a real profit with the original Xbox however, it seems that the Seattle-based giant isn't afraid to take the console plunge again, despite it being a plunge that, if it's not careful, could leave it still sopping wet by the time Sony and Nintendo join the party.

Of course, it certainly needn't worry about consumer desire – if there's one thing the Xbox 360 appears to have going for it, it's a slew of people all wanting to get their hands on one on launch day. But is that as good as it sounds? Perhaps not if you're the one responsible for ensuring the supply matches the demand; Microsoft has already confessed that it's incredibly unlikely that enough machines will make it to stores to satisfy everyone that wants one (the machine will be 'hard to find' this Christmas, according to Xbox UK head Neil Thompson), even through a launch window that leads all the way through to January 2006. **games™** is already aware of some independent retailers receiving units in low single figures (despite having in excess of 20 pre-orders), while even local mainstream stores are only expected to receive enough to satisfy half their pre-orders. It's almost a repeat of last Christmas when you couldn't get an Xbox anywhere – except this time, the stakes are infinitely higher. Still, when your biggest rival is already insisting that its machine will be a beast of almost unparalleled power – causing people to think about waiting a little longer – you have to wonder whether a lack of machines is your biggest problem.





It's no secret that Microsoft managed to make little profit with the Xbox, yet the company has apparently no fear of throwing everything it has at the early launch of its new system – something that reeks of confidence and self-belief, though a quick glance at the specifications available is all it takes to see why such confidence is, perhaps, justifiable. The Xbox 360 has custom-designed innards. Not only this, but everything inside the 360 is top of the range. The original Xbox has a single CPU of about 700MHz speed. The 360 has three cores running at 3.2GHz and they can use SMT (Simultaneous Multi Threading) which, by allowing the CPUs to do two things at the same time, gives the 360 the equivalent of six cores. That's a lot of power; it's just a question of whether developers can use it.

While it's true that the majority of games available to play at the time of print have not only managed to impress but have also been greeted with a spectacular array of oohs and aahs, it's been argued that certain titles available at launch don't quite complement the vision that we've all been exposed to. "If you think games don't look next generation enough, then you're simply forgetting the fact that it's a different generation," Filmer tells us. "Developers need much longer to actually get to grips with developing for multi-core CPUs. Despite the fancy videos, the initial wave of PS3 games won't look any better."

He is, of course, correct. How many consoles have shown their true capabilities from the beginning? We'd argue: none. Even now, spectacular visuals that were never believed possible are being squeezed from the innards of the PlayStation2. So, where the technology contained within the 360 will lead us is a daunting prospect. Whereas generational changes before now have been more about refinement of gameplay or graphics, the 360 marks the start of an era where all your entertainment can run together, work together and

LOOKING FORWARDS

Certainly, the Xbox 360 isn't lacking a few titles that show its next-generation abilities off. *Project Gotham Racing 3*, for example, is undoubtedly the star of the launch line-up; stunning both in terms of graphics and handling, its Live integration alone will certainly set the pace for other games to match. And then there's *Perfect Dark Zero*, Rare's long-awaited sequel that gives you everything you could ask for as far as graphical prowess goes – along with *Kameo: Elements Of Power*, the developer is clearly back on form.



"The Xbox 360's lack of true high-definition support may prove costly in the future"

"The Xbox 360's technical abilities afford Microsoft a fair amount of confidence"

"To see *Quake 4* stuttering along on the 360 is to suddenly start thinking that Ken Kutaragi's comments aren't that of a mad man," Will Johnston, *Play* magazine's features editor tells us, "but rather, someone who knows of a future that Microsoft has failed to comprehend." He speaks, of course, of Kutaragi's now infamous 'the PS3 is not a games machine' quote. "Kutaragi has been spouting much jingoistic babble about the PlayStation3," Johnston declares. "But at least he's aiming high and talking about a true next-generation console rather than one based on yesterday's technology."

'Yesterday's technology' might be something of a sweeping statement, but there's certainly some truth to the idea that the Xbox 360 doesn't quite do everything that its creator has suggested. The fact that much of the machine's initial push focused on the 'high-definition era' that it would usher in, for instance, is certainly slightly misleading. On one hand, the machine is far from genuinely HD ready (coming, as it does, bereft of the HDMI or DVI support, something that adopters of HD systems have already leapt upon) while on the other, the vast majority of the UK and Europe is completely unprepared for the high-definition era. While such screens are slowly filtering into the consciousness of the masses, quality products (as opposed to quick-fix smaller solutions) are still too costly for the average consumer or impulse buyer. Introducing a console that supports a system many of us don't have and probably won't have for several years? Talk about jumping the gun…

But then, that's another issue that really needs to be addressed – are gamers and, indeed, the industry really ready to take that jump into the next generation? Do we even need it right now? Looking at recent and upcoming examples such as *Soul Calibur III, Shadow Of The Colossus, Burnout Revenge* and *Zelda: Twilight Princess,* the answer should be an emphatic 'no thanks'; the current-generation systems are still more than capable of

LOOKING BACKWARDS

As perfect examples of next-gen desperation, both *Gun* and *Tony Hawk's American Wasteland* are nothing more than chronically basic ports of fair Xbox games, where an extra ten pounds on the price tag is the only addition of note. It's a real shame, as we'd hoped for so much more from the initial batch of games – unfortunately though, we suspect that they won't be the last releases that can be criticised for failing to take advantage of the benefits that the Xbox 360 offers…



be enjoyed together. That's cameras, CDs, DVDs, PCs… everything can become a part of the experience, making your 360 the heart of your home entertainment. Add to this the impressive online plans – an area in which Microsoft has already proven itself – and the possibilities, although far from endless, are certainly worthy of the hype we've been force fed for so long. "It opens up everything," Filmer explains. "You can actually stream content to your pals: videos, slideshows… everything. Better still, it's always on. You can chat to your friends even if they're not playing a game and are just listening to music. Let's just say, it's 'the shit', shall we?"

Naturally, the ugly pessimist that resides deep inside each of us speaks of other issues. What if the proverbial gun has been jumped? What if, due to eagerness to hit the shelves before its rivals, Microsoft has delivered a package that's not quite everything it should be? What if the colossal demand can't be satisfied? After all, it's very easy to get sucked in when you have a heaving mass of shouting Americans telling you all about the future of gaming and how it will be available to all by the end of the year. Maybe it simply won't be 'all that' – there are certainly plenty of people out there who feel that an error has been made, and these people are just waiting for Microsoft to slip up.

However, cynicism is always present when a bold move is made, and there will always be those who promote doubt. Thankfully, it's unlikely that these people will be quite as negative once they've seen the glory that is *PGR3* running in high definition and we predict plenty of knowing smiles being wiped from smug faces. No matter what boastful comments Ken Kutaragi starts spewing next, with so much already delivered and an even larger amount of untapped potential available, there's little doubt that the 360 is going to be a strong contender in the next-gen war.

OOH, SHINY

One of Microsoft's key driving points for the Xbox 360 is that it's always online – a fact driven home by the separation of its Xbox Live service into Gold and Silver. Naturally, Gold will be the most preferred option (as it allows you to play online and access the lucrative Xbox Live Marketplace), but with Silver coming as standard, you can still chat to friends online and make use of various other online options, all for free. Bargain.



“Microsoft has already said that the 360 will be ‘difficult’ to find at retail this Christmas”

“Those lucky enough to get their machines this Christmas are in for a real treat”

producing games with genuinely gorgeous visuals, so the need for a step up (and it’s only a marginal step up at best) is drastically reduced, no matter how much Epic Games’ VP Mark Rein tries to tell us that, “it’s all about graphics.”

And then there’s concern for the industry as a whole. Developers are already being rushed into this new dawn of game creation and the results are telling; from Xbox 1.5 releases such as *Gun* and *Tony Hawk’s American Wasteland* that, to be honest, really don’t cut it visually to stand as part of the new console’s line-up, to games such as *Quake 4* (which, despite looking nice, just looks like the PC port it is against the handful of ‘real’ next-gen games on offer), the launch line-up is far from the greatest range of titles that Peter Moore promised at X05.

“There’s no real ‘wow’ factor,” Johnston continues, “and by that, I mean there’s nothing that says, ‘Hello, I’m a 360 and you need me’. What we do get for the most part is a selection of games that could have easily come out last year on a PC. If the launch had been set back a while, to a time when developers had addressed the machines’ cores and multi-thread data treatments, then Microsoft would have at least a couple more games that act as a technical demonstration of what the future might hold.”

Naturally, the optimist inside us speaks of this being the initial launch period that all consoles go through and that, given time, the machine will truly shine – which we don’t doubt for a second. But equally, we can’t help wondering what could have been done with an additional, say, six months of preparation – a little more forward planning and a little less of the American bravado that’s seen Microsoft almost push the machine unwillingly onto the shelves. The truth of the matter is that the facts, laid out as they are, certainly don’t inspire confidence, at least for the months ahead. We just hope this next Xbox stays the course and we don’t have to go through all this again in another three years…



"OUR GOALS FOR THE STORY AND FEATURES FOR MASS EFFECT ARE SO EXPANSIVE THAT WE FEEL A TRILOGY IS THE BEST WAY TO DO IT JUSTICE"
CASEY HUDSON, PRODUCER, BIOWARE

BIOWARE VENTURES BRAVELY INTO UNKNOWN TERRITORY

MASS EFFECT

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: BioWare Corp
RELEASE: Q4 '06
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

COMMENT

A cutting-edge, futuristic RPG with real-time, strategic combat and a vast universe to explore; *Mass Effect* promises to let players influence the fate of humankind in a hostile galaxy.

HISTORY

The first in BioWare's new, original sci-fi trilogy, *Mass Effect* was announced at X05 and is already causing a stir both within the developer's fan base and further afield.

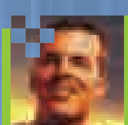
BioWare is one of only a few developers that consistently produce high quality videogames. The Canadian outfit's recent history is punctuated with fine titles such as *Jade Empire* and, of course, *Knights Of The Old Republic* – easily the best *Star Wars*-licensed game available at the time of its release. Its comprehensive RPGs (Xbox or otherwise) have garnered a large following, conclusively laying to rest that persistent myth that western developers can't make excellent role-playing games.

It's perhaps not much of a surprise, then, that another BioWare RPG was among the games announced for the Xbox 360 at this year's X05 event in Amsterdam. What is surprising is that the planned release should be *Mass Effect*, an entirely new creative departure and not a follow-up to *Jade Empire* which may yet be incarnated in its originally planned tripartite form. A futuristic, science fiction role-playing game which, in keeping with BioWare tradition, places a lot of emphasis on player choice and influence. It differs from the norm in its squad-based real-time combat and the vastness of its galactic environment. *Mass Effect* is also due to be realised as a trilogy – which says much for the richness of its universe. "Our goals for the story and features of *Mass Effect* are so expansive that we feel a trilogy is the best way to do justice to that vision," explains Casey Hudson, the game's producer and one of the minds behind almost all of BioWare's top-notch titles. "We have delivered a trilogy in the past [with *Baldur's Gate*] and we plan to do this again with *Mass Effect*."

Despite the fact that this is a new series, BioWare has already had its fair share of experience in sci-fi-based game concepts – something the game's development team is well aware of. "We have already taken gamers on an epic space-based adventure in the past, with the *Star Wars* franchise," reflects Ray Muzyka, co-executive producer of *Mass Effect* and joint CEO of BioWare Corp. "With *Mass Effect*, however, BioWare is going to use its well-known brand of rich storytelling and engaging game-play to bring gamers an entirely new vision of the future." Comforting news for *KOTOR* fanatics. *Mass Effect* is familiar in terms of setting and yet different enough to provide us with an enticingly new experience. But

BIG AND BEAUTIFUL

Mass Effect's universe is absolutely vast, incorporating several different races and countless planets – some of which won't even be mapped. "Our vision of Mass Effect being the ultimate science fiction experience includes giving the player the power to truly explore the galaxy," explains Hudson. "To achieve this, we've created the concept of Uncharted Worlds. While exploring and viewing certain planets from orbit, you'll occasionally discover an Uncharted World that is safe a location for landing. You'll be able to drop down to the surface and explore these planets with a goal of unearthing interesting enemies or ancient alien artefacts. Uncharted Worlds will provide the player with a sense of a much larger explorable galaxy via a very fun, non-linear play experience."



PRODUCER PROFILE

■ Casey Hudson is producer and project director on *Mass Effect*. His name is associated with many of BioWare's standout products: from the critically acclaimed *Neverwinter Nights* to the more recent and astonishingly successful *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic* games on the Xbox and PC.

HISTORY

- **STAR WARS: KOTOR** 2003 [Xbox]
- **NEVERWINTER NIGHTS** 2002 [PC]
- **BALDUR'S GATE II** 2000 [PC]

■ Landing on random planets is likely to get you into a whole heap of alien-based trouble.

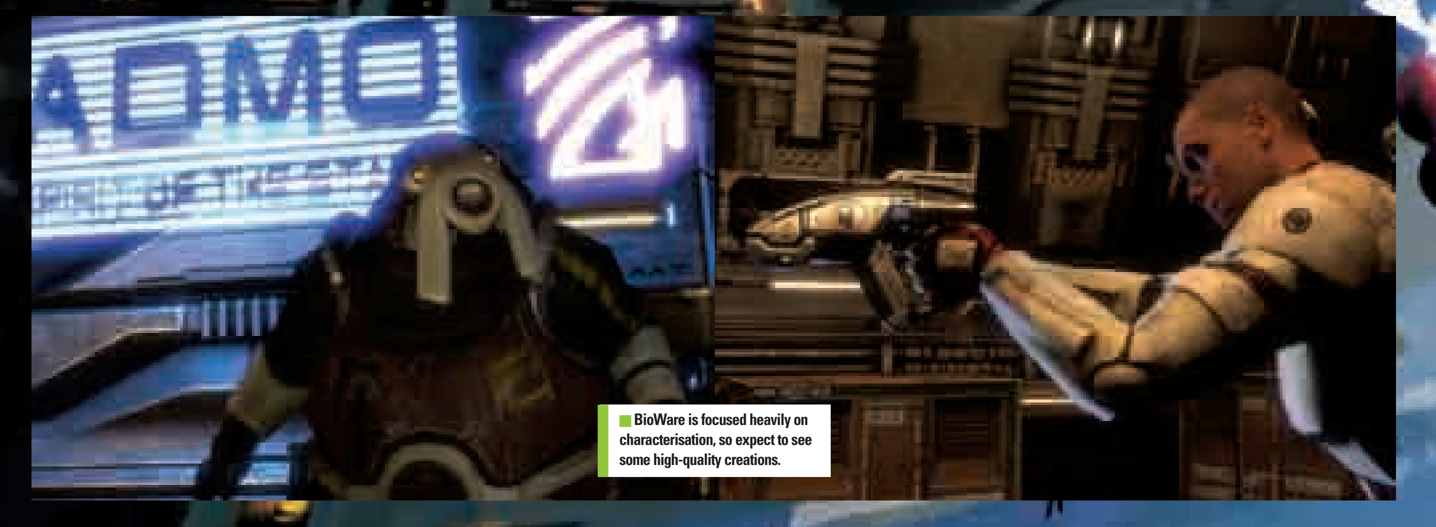
why go with the familiarity of a galactic setting as opposed to *Jade Empire*'s new, lush Chinese locale? "We wanted to do something with a futuristic theme," asserts Muzyka. "*Mass Effect* allows us to create an entirely new universe, without any restrictions on the types of worlds, races, vehicles, weapons, histories or conflicts that accompany a licensed property. With this in mind, we felt we could return to the sci-fi genre while at the same time, be trying something new."

Having a licence to work with, however, has its own advantages. A licence provides an already strong foundation for a development team, especially one as rich in potential and as universally well known as *Star Wars*. "We've had the opportunity to work with some amazing licences in the past, such as *Dungeons And Dragons* and *Star Wars* – both licences that we regard with reverence and are honoured to be associated with," says Muzyka. "Certainly, working with an established licence can be challenging – the built-in fan base is a blessing but also represents a large responsibility with regards to meeting (and hopefully exceeding) their expectations." Working with a new universe, however, offers a freedom that just isn't available when a game is bound by the rules of a universe that is not the development team's own – but it comes with unique problems.

"BIOWARE'S DETERMINATION TO INNOVATE WITHIN THIS NEW BRAND IS ADMIRABLE"

"With a brand new BioWare-owned IP, new challenges arise," observes Muzyka. "The most obvious one is the requirement to form our own framework for the new universe we are creating – one that is immersive and believable for players while at the same time creates a sense of epic scope and unlimited possibility. Another challenge is creating awareness and acceptance of this new IP in the market. So, for example, when gamers see *Mass Effect* on the shelf, they both recognise it and know what to expect from playing it."

Indeed, an entirely new game runs the risk of never achieving the brand ▷

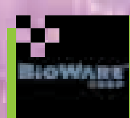


■ BioWare is focused heavily on characterisation, so expect to see some high-quality creations.



HOW DO I LOOK?

As in BioWare's previous games, there is a considerable element of character customisation present in *Mass Effect*. Upon choosing your character you will be presented with a variety of appearance customisation options as well as the usual class and gender options. While exploring the universe, characters will also develop in other ways; there's a slightly *Fable*-esque twist, in that appearance affects how you are likely to be regarded by NPCs. This spirit of creativity is mirrored in the game's striking visual style. "One of the themes *Mass Effect* explores is the juxtaposition of nature and organic life with technology and artificial intelligence," muses Muzyka. "For example, the stunning beauty of natural environments is put in stark contrast with the harsh lines of machines, ships and artificial constructs."



COMPANY PROFILE

■ BioWare Corp has a long history of outstanding output and an excellent relationship with Microsoft. Its games have appeared on both the Xbox and PC. *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic* won an incredible 126 awards, ranking – along with its other Xbox game *Jade Empire* – among the best console RPGs ever made.

HISTORY

- **JADE EMPIRE** 2005 [Xbox]
- **STAR WARS: KOTOR** 2003 [Xbox]
- **NEVERWINTER NIGHTS** 2002 [PC]





■ *Mass Effect* pits bio-mechanical nightmares against the last few fragments of the human race…



"EXTREMELY GOOD CINEMATIC STORYTELLING IS A CENTRAL FOCUS FOR US AT BIOWARE"
GREG ZESCHUK, CO-EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, BIOWARE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

FUTURE PERFECT

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC - STAR WARS x VAST UNIVERSE = MASS EFFECT



The game's unique combat system sounds intriguing, and it works incredibly well too.

"THE NEW TECHNOLOGY THAT THE XBOX 360 THROWS INTO THE PLAYING FIELD ALSO ALLOWS FOR MUCH MORE SOPHISTICATED ON-SCREEN INTERACTION"

familiarity of something like *KOTOR*, but the BioWare brand itself has a large number of rightly deserved followers, and as the Xbox 360's flagship RPG, it's bound to generate interest even in those who would not otherwise follow it. BioWare's determination to innovate within this new brand is admirable. Greg Zeschuk, BioWare's second CEO and co-executive producer of the game, is keen to emphasis its unique features: the squad-based combat allows the player to switch between team members in real-time and conduct them as desired. "You'll also have lots of things to do in combat beyond shooting," elaborates Zeschuk, "like a science-based form of superhuman abilities called Biotics, and tech skills that are very aggressive and weapon-like in their effect. Combat will be intensely tactical and the choices a player makes during combat will have a significant impact on the final result."

In terms of plot, *Mass Effect* aims to tell its story more effectively than anything that has gone before it. "Extremely good cinematic storytelling is a central focus for us at BioWare," explains Zeschuk. "Some of our work is focused on a new and extremely intuitive conversation system that allows a level of dialogue sophistication beyond what we've had in previous BioWare games." The new technology that the Xbox 360 throws into the playing field also allows for much more sophisticated on-screen interaction between character models – even going so far as to incorporate body language, as Greg explains to us: "Much of the technology we're developing is in what we call 'advanced story rendering' features. This covers a broad set of features meant to bring our digital actors to life in ways never seen before… we're also developing facial animation systems and animation behaviours that go beyond what we've been able to do in the past."

Of course, the BioWare tradition of player empowerment is set to continue in *Mass Effect*. As the game goes on and the universe is explored to a greater extent, the player gains more and more influence and is eventually able to control the fate of all life in the known universe. "Since the ability to affect the story and world in which *Mass Effect* takes place is essential to the game, we're providing lots of options via both dialogue choices and direct player actions to make significant choices," emphasises Hudson. "The player personally impacts events affecting the future of all humankind in the galaxy, based on his or her actions. It's rather weighty stuff…"

Upon witnessing the scope of *Mass Effect* and the vision of the team behind it, it's difficult not to be impressed. The game's bright, bold potential shines through even at this early stage. "Any challenges inherent in pursuing our own IP are more than acceptable given how much creative leeway it gives us to offer players something new and exciting," concludes Muzyka. "It gives us the freedom to harness the collective imagination of the incredibly talented pool of developers here at BioWare – all passionate, hardworking, and creative – to bring about an entirely new universe for players to immerse themselves in." And a very promising looking universe it is too – we cannot wait to get to grips with it.

SPACE WARS

The combat is probably *Mass Effect's* most significant departure from the norm. Based around squad mechanics, it's set to be much more tactical than the real-time combat we've seen in other BioWare games. "*Mass Effect* will feature a brand new, real-time, squad-based tactical combat system which fans of our past games will love," according to Muzyka. Greg Zeschuk is also keen to emphasise the game's unique approach to combat: "Generally we're targeting a real-time tactical combat system. It centres on ranged combat and will look like a third-person shooter but will play out in a way that supports the RPG aspects of the game really well." Hopefully, the issues which many people had with *Jade Empire's* fighting will be resolved.

METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS



"KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS WILL CONCENTRATE ITS EFFORTS TO TAKE FULL ADVANTAGE OF THE PS3'S HARDWARE CAPABILITIES, INFUSING THE WORLD OF METAL GEAR SOLID WITH COMPLETELY NEW GAME DESIGNS AND CONCEPTS"

KONAMI PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

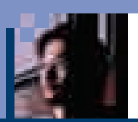
PATRIOT GAMES

METAL GEAR SOLID 2 x PLAYSTATION3 - RAIDEN = METAL GEAR SOLID 4

Otacon has aged a lot better than his serpentine buddy, that's for sure.

METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS

PLAYSTATION3



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Hideo Kojima is part of a very exclusive club. He's one of videogaming's only auteurs; a developer who ensures his personal vision is never strayed from. This dogged tenacity has led to some of the greatest games of the last generation.

HISTORY

- **METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER** 2004 [PS2]
- **BOKTAI: THE SUN IS IN YOUR HAND** 2003 [GBA]
- **METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SONS OF LIBERTY** 2001 [Multi]



COULD THIS BE SNAKE'S LAST STAND?

PS3 **Genius. Pretentious. Immersive. Boring. Thrilling. Controversial.** Not many games encourage discussion like *Metal Gear*. To some, it's a post-modern masterpiece, a heady mix of cinema and interactivity that plays with the very definition of a videogame. To others, it's cut-scene-heavy, confused nonsense – the definition of everything that's wrong with modern gaming. There's one thing that everyone can agree on, and that's that *Metal Gear* titles are crucial events in gaming's cultural history. Naturally then, *Metal Gear Solid 4* looks set to etch another indelible mark when it arrives on Sony's next-generation PlayStation3.

Nine minutes of glorious footage shown at the recent Tokyo Games Show has been enough to crank the rumour machine up a gear. Kojima is a master at building hype, drip-feeding information, whipping his fan base into an uncontrollable fervour before the game's final unveiling, however, there are a few concrete facts upon which we can concentrate. The first is the game's setting: within 30 seconds of the trailer beginning, it's clear that we're looking at a future war – think *Ghost Recon 3* or *Killzone* and you'll be on the right lines. We see an ageing Snake sneaking around a shelled-out war zone in the middle of an arid desert. He may look haggard, but he still moves with all the grace and elegance we have come to expect. He also has a moustache. Snake never was the most fashionable of chaps.

Snake's age and health clearly play a major part in the gameplay. A key scene in the trailer sees him doubled up with a vicious cough, which he can only relieve by giving himself an injection in the neck. Perhaps this could be the end of Solid Snake? Perhaps it's a different Snake altogether? Only time will tell. We'll also have to wait and see whether the bold party line 'nowhere to hide' is apt. The trailer suggests that this will be the most action-focused *Metal Gear* yet. Both the TGS footage and the E3 parody trailer show Snake spraying bullets from his SMG with reckless abandon. However, rumours of a disguise-based mechanic have also been doing the rounds, so there's a very real possibility that Kojima will once again revolutionise stealth in videogames.

There may be doubt surrounding the direction of the series and its main character, but there's no disputing how the game looks. Kojima Productions is touting the trailer as real-time – even taking a swipe at *Killzone 2* in classic Kojima style – and the effect is spellbinding. The wind kicks up swirls of dust from the ground, which diffracts the harsh sunlight, creating a visual resonance usually reserved for Hollywood blockbuster CG. With allusions to the fact that *MGS4* will feature an adjustable 3D camera, players will be able to fully appreciate the effort put into the game's look. Of course, none of this will matter if it plays like a marshmallow drum kit, but if these are *Metal Gear 4*'s in-game graphics, then we're in for a visual treat.

No one knows exactly when *Guns Of The Patriots* will see the light of day (although it's unlikely to be finished in time for the console's launch unless the machine itself slips into 2007), or whether the final game will match the gorgeous trailer. But as a swansong to Kojima's groundbreaking series we'd be very surprised if it turned out to be anything less than breathtaking.

"THERE'S A VERY REAL POSSIBILITY THAT KOJIMA WILL ONCE AGAIN REVOLUTIONISE STEALTH IN VIDEOGAMES"

DETAILS

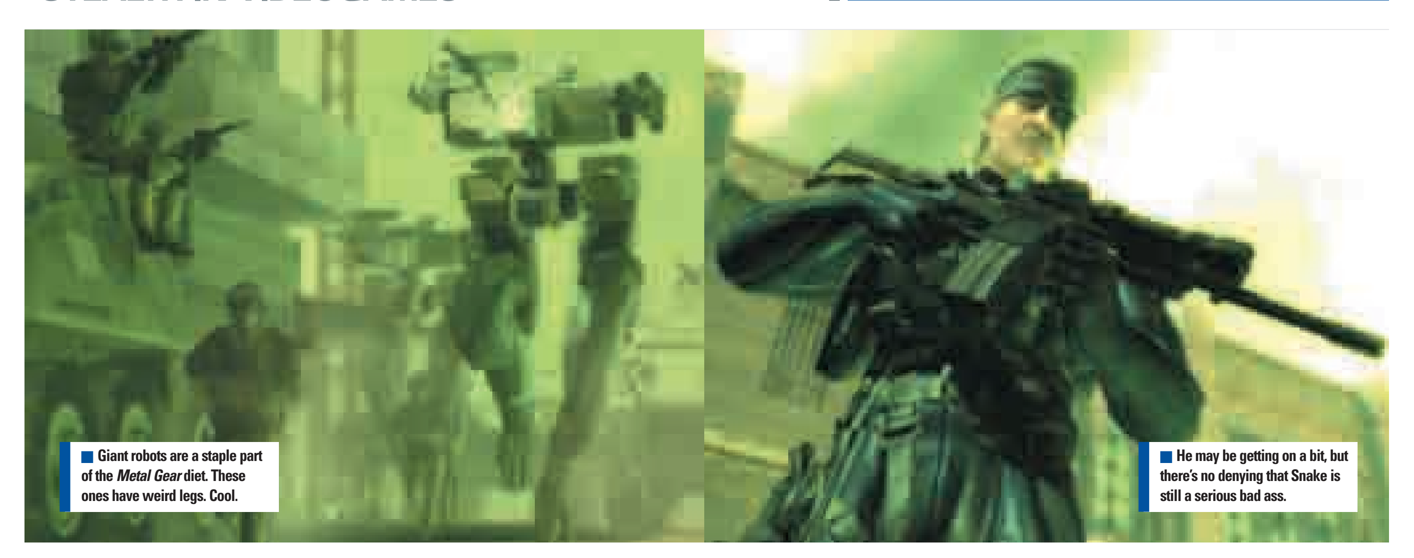
FORMAT: PlayStation3
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: Kojima Productions
RELEASE: TBA '06
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ Supposedly the final part of Kojima's legendary *Metal Gear Solid* series, and already the most-anticipated game on the PlayStation3.

CIRCLE OF LIFE

When asked about the power of the PlayStation3, there's a recurrent theme in Hideo Kojima's words: he says that while others may just be interested in boosting the visual aspects of their games, he's far more concerned with what cannot be seen. He suggests that if it rains within his gamespace, he wants the plant life to grow. If an enemy is wounded, he wants them to go through a physical, mental and spiritual change. Kojima can usually be relied upon to push the envelope, so it'll be fascinating to see just what he can achieve with the PlayStation3.



■ Giant robots are a staple part of the *Metal Gear* diet. These ones have weird legs. Cool.

■ He may be getting on a bit, but there's no denying that Snake is still a serious bad ass.

PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE



■ AI-controlled party members will play a supportive role – so it's good that they have Lighsabers...

■ We've been promised dramatic character development throughout the game's 50 hours of play.

FEEL LIKE GOING IT ALONE?

PS2 **Believe it or not, not everyone played *Phantasy Star Online* over the internet.** In fact, according to the conservative estimate of Takao Miyoshi (*Phantasy Star Universe*'s producer), only about 20 per cent of people ever took the game online – hampered no doubt by the Dreamcast's lacklustre online service, the universal shortages of GameCube broadband adapters and the rather belated conversion of *PSO Online Episode I & II* to the Xbox. It's perhaps just as well, then, that Sonic Team is reviving *Phantasy Star* as a single-player adventure…

Phantasy Star Universe will be the first in the series to incorporate a substantial single-player quest since 1994. The story follows Ethan on a quest to rescue his sister from mysterious cosmic enemies and will span three planets and 50 hours' worth of gameplay. What's more, the *Phantasy Star* universe will be fleshed out with more weapons and items, revamped combat and a new race of people. It also has an online multiplayer, but that will not be the main focus of the game.

Since being shown at E3 this year, a lot of detail about *PSU's* story has emerged. For instance, a new Beast race will feature in addition to the Human, Numan and Cast (Android) races – all of which will return with slightly deeper levels of complexity. It's not clear whether or not there will be any new occupations, but the new race will introduce several new combinations regardless.

The differences between character races and occupations will be more pronounced than in the online games which, due to the characters' essential similarities, became monotonous. This variety affects your performance substantially, while the much-improved combat system sees players able to switch into first-person mode and shoot enemies away rather than dealing with them in the customary sword-swiping manner. There will also be an in-depth character creation tool allowing for more character variety online. Offline, it would appear that players will not always be controlling Ethan – supporting characters may be directly controllable on occasion.

Visually, *PSU* will awaken a twinge of nostalgia in fans of the earlier DC versions. The game retains the organic, bright look to which fans have become accustomed and aside from improved animation and character rendering, it looks almost exactly the same as its predecessors. The monsters that have so far been on show have also been reminiscent of those found in *Phantasy Star Online*'s universe, suggesting a subtle wink from Sonic Team to fans of the series.

Online the game will follow a different story entirely – again distinguishing it from the *Phantasy Star Online* games where single-player and online modes were the same. It's not yet clear whether monthly subscriptions will be mandatory or if any offline multiplayer modes will be included (such a feature might be jolly for fans with two or three friends and empty wallets).

For many, *PSU* will be regarded as the next step for the series – matching the online games' popularity with a proper single-player experience. What we've played already has left us eager for more; so far, two scenarios have been demonstrated, one expansive outdoor area and one interestingly lit dungeon, with nasty bosses at the end of each. Hopefully, we won't have too long to wait – if all goes to plan, *PSU* should be ready in early 2006.

"PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE SIMULTANEOUSLY REPRESENTS BOTH A NEW DIRECTION AND A RETURN TO THE SERIES' ROOTS"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2, PC
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: Sonic Team
RELEASE: May '06 (Jap: Jan '06, US: May '06)
GENRE: Action RPG
PLAYERS: 1 (Massively Multiplayer Online)

CONCEPT

■ *Phantasy Star* returns to its roots, with a full-feature 50-hour one-player RPG – without deserting its online heritage.

COMBAT EVOLVED

In addition to the new classes and abilities that *Phantasy Star Universe* will introduce, there's now the opportunity to dual wield. A gun and a sword can be held at the same time keeping you prepared for both melee and long-range combat. The combo system has also been improved; where before only three moves could be performed in a string, characters can now be built up to pull off five or six at once. Apparently, though, the dual wielding will have little bearing on the combo system, as only one weapon can be used in a combo at one time. Shame really – a sweeping blade uppercut followed by a few shots to the torso would make very short work of the best of monsters.

PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE

PLAYSTATION2/MULTIFORMAT



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Sega's in-house Sonic Team is one of the only undisrupted outfits following the Sega Sammy merger and is responsible for most of Sega's key franchises over the years including, obviously, *Sonic The Hedgehog*. The development studio is currently working on a variety of new projects.

HISTORY

- **FEEL THE MAGIC XY/XX,** 2004 [Nintendo DS]
- **PHANTASY STAR ONLINE,** 2001 [Dreamcast]
- **SONIC THE HEDGEHOG,** 1990 [Mega Drive]

■ The usual mix of magical and physical skills will be available for all classes.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

UNIVERSAL APPEAL

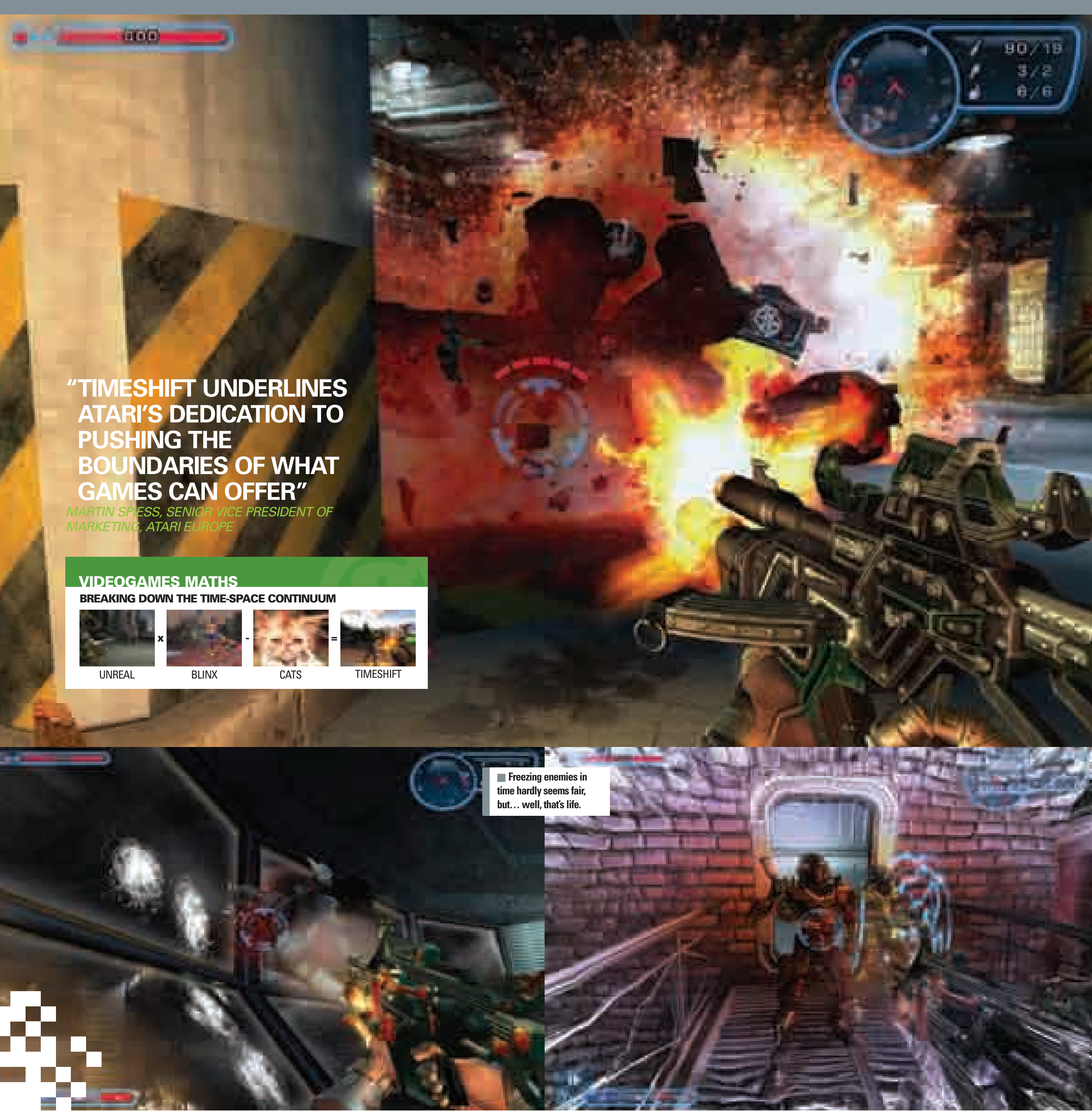
PHANTASY STAR ONLINE EP II + DECENT SINGLE PLAY - MONOTONY = PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE

"WE BASICALLY WENT BACK TO THE ROOTS OF WHAT MAKES A GOOD RPG AND CREATED A SOLID, STRONG OFFLINE FOUNDATION"

TAKAO MIYOSHI, SONIC TEAM

■ You might be alone this time around, but the foes are no less fearsome.

TIMESHIFT



"TIMESHIFT UNDERLINES ATARI'S DEDICATION TO PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF WHAT GAMES CAN OFFER"

MARTIN SPIESS, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING, ATARI EUROPE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

BREAKING DOWN THE TIME-SPACE CONTINUUM

UNREAL x BLINX - CATS = TIMESHIFT

■ Freezing enemies in time hardly seems fair, but… well, that's life.



TIMESHIFT

XBOX 360/MULTIFORMAT



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Based in New York, Saber is a firm very much geared toward creating PC and next-gen titles and has found its niche within the FPS genre. Its own Saber 3D engine showcases great technical prowess and incorporates many of the separate elements of which games are comprised.

HISTORY

WILL ROCK 2003 [PC]



From what we've seen so far, Saber has achieved a lot with their own engine.

The weapon combinations you can create in *TimeShift* are worth experimenting with.

STOP! IN THE NAME OF BLOOD

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360, Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Atari
DEVELOPER: Saber Interactive
RELEASE: Q1 '06
GENRE: Shoot-'Em-Up
PLAYERS: 1 (2-TBA Online)

CONCEPT

A second outing for Activision's wildly successful World War II FPS, and another glimpse at the power and potential of the Xbox 360.

Gaming gimmicks are two-a-penny these days. More games rely on elements du jour than we can count, and with every developer looking to leap on the bandwagon when a new trend kicks off, it's unlikely to be a fleeting thing. And given that bullet time has been around the block innumerable times and outstayed its welcome somewhat, it's about time that people took a leaf out of Blinx's book and took quantum manipulation to the next level. Which *TimeShift* does. Handy, eh?

With its hi-tech steampunk inspiration, it should come as no surprise that the weapons are suitably nasty. Not only are most covered in spikes and valves that will make melee attacks hurt that bit more, but some ingenious combinations of traditional firearms will create new ones. For example, the flamethrower doubles as a pistol that fires incendiary bullets to scorch foes from afar, while more traditional arms like the shotgun also have their advantages, in this case a clockwork mechanism to minimise reload times and maximise carnage.

Time control abilities come from lead hero Swift's Quantum Suit, allowing the wearer to bend the flow of time around him while remaining impervious to the effects himself. This can work both for and against the user, although it's easily more of the former – reversing time sees enemy troops inadvertently retreating and sucking bullets back into their guns, while stopping it altogether allows you to dance around soldiers, steal their guns or even sneak past, unseen. A sight to behold in itself, this also allows for some advanced tactics. When time is stopped or reversed, foes will have no knowledge of what happened during the quantum anomaly, allowing you to finish an objective quickly and dash to a decent weapon before taking cover in a new location, or simply waste entire armies without them realising. But since the user is impervious to it all, there are drawbacks.

Rewind can't be used as an 'extra life', as in *Prince Of Persia*, so any damage done or ammo spent can't be recovered. Also, both the health bar and time power meter recharge off the same source; if you take damage and use time control at the same time, only one can be refreshed at once. Taking cover in these situations is essential. Apparently, these time control powers will also make it into online multiplayer, but the developer remains tight-lipped about how this unique feature will actually work. While individual powers shouldn't be too hard to implement (with the exception of perhaps rewind), it'll be what happens when multiple effects are used simultaneously that determines whether or not this can actually make for a balanced game.

At this stage, we still have a few issues with *TimeShift*. Wreaking havoc while time is paused is somewhat unsatisfying and even the resultant bedlam when time kicks back in isn't really explosive enough to make the static period worth waiting out. That said, we'd be lying if we claimed not to be impressed by what Saber has accomplished so far. The AI seems solid enough, moving on positions and using cover and grenades to pin you down; weapons are interesting and actually fun to use; time powers can be used in a multitude of offensive and defensive capacities. And while our demo focused more on what *TimeShift* can do than how it actually plays, a later presentation showed the game in a more traditional light and it was all the better for it. One to watch for once you've had your fill of *Perfect Dark Zero* and *Quake 4*.

> "TIME POWERS CAN BE USED IN A MULTITUDE OF OFFENSIVE AND DEFENSIVE CAPACITIES"

DON'T CALL THEM PUZZLES…

While your time control powers can be advantageous in battle, they can often be used to deal with practical real-world issues as well. A jet of flame from a burst pipe can be traversed by pausing the flow of time, while a high-speed fan can be slowed down to allow you to pass. But the developer has been keen to point out that it doesn't like such elements being referred to as 'puzzles'. A little lateral thinking might be required here and there, sure, but fear not – you won't see anything close to the tasks of *Alundra* or *Tomb Raider*. Thank God…

SUPREME COMMANDER

RTS ON A GRAND SCALE

Most long-standing RTS fans will remember *Total Annihilation*, a genre classic from developer Cavedog. The lack of a sequel left fans bereft, but after several years developing the *Dungeon Siege* games at his new studio Gas Powered Games, Chris Taylor is returning to his roots to make what he hopes will be another epic strategy title: *Supreme Commander*.

Although there's little detail at this early stage, it's clear that the developer is aiming to bring something new to the genre. The game's depictions of huge-scale battles (three or four of which may be happening at the same time) look very ambitious indeed, as does the comparative scale of the units. These screenshots show the enormous disparity in size between relatively normal tanks and the game's giant mechs. The player will be able to view the map from a global perspective, or zoom in to take a closer look at the battles going on either on the ground or at sea.

Naval combat also looks to be a focal point of the game. The battleships are a lethal force and rather than rivers and lakes, the maps feature huge oceans as sparring ground for submarines and ships. Indeed, the developer seems keen to push the technology available, with advanced battle balancing and a pathfinding mechanic which bolsters the AI by giving it the ability to find the easiest and quickest route across land without requiring constant player direction.

Typically, there will be three different civilisations in the game: the Terrans, the Aeons, and the Cybrans, whose units will reflect their political and ideological distinctions in more than just appearance.

Units are apparently all robotic and under the control of the *Supreme Commander* master unit, an enormous structure whose importance in battle is key. Complex strategic thought as well as quick adaptation will be necessary in order to attain victory on the game's grand scale.

Naturally, fans of *Total Annihilation* should keep a very close eye on *Supreme Commando* – as should anyone with a soft spot for inventive RTS titles. Hopefully its grand scale won't be so ambitious that it lets the game down in terms of base gameplay.

> "RATHER THAN RIVERS AND LAKES, THE MAPS FEATURE HUGE OCEANS AND VAST TERRAIN"



Can the action get a little hectic? You can see that for yourself…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Gas Powered Games
RELEASE: TBA '06
GENRE: RTS
PLAYERS: 1 (2-4 Online)

CONCEPT

Total Annihilation returns, albeit on a far grander scale.



The impressive aerial view even allows you to zoom right in to observe what's going on.

Large scale with plenty of explosions – just how we like our RTS.


eMag

CHROMEHOUNDS





No matter what your favourite mode of transport, there's a mech to suit you.

THE PRETTIEST ROBOTS YOU'LL EVER SEE

Mech fans have, so far, been well catered for by the Xbox. For the hardcore, there was *Steel Battalion* with its ridiculously large and complex controller and equally huge price. For those without a spare £200, *MechAssault* and its sequel provided solid, explosion-heavy action with considerably less strategic clout. Even *Phantom Crash* proved its worth in certain circles with its variety of customisation possibilities. However, From Software is in the privileged position of developing the Xbox 360's first mech game, incorporating elements from all of the above as well as from the development studio's previous mech games, namely the *Armored Core* series. The game was on show first at E3 then subsequently at TGS and X05, and already looks like as satisfying a mech game as we could have hoped for.

Set in the standard post-apocalyptic future of mech games, *CHROMEHOUNDS'* single-player sees the player dropped into a future where war is imminent. Choosing between three world nations and six pilot characters, the story takes place while tensions are rising and mechs are being used in an attempt to diffuse the discord. Interestingly, the multiplayer and online parts of the game take place at a different time – after the war has broken out – providing more of an excuse for huge-scale mech battling. Online play looks very strategic, with commanders being assigned to co-ordinate other players into an organised, effective assault.

The barren world is seen through either a *Steel Battalion*-style first-person cockpit view or a third-person, slightly less intimidating prospect. The environments are enormous to the point where finding one's opponent, not to mention keeping focus on them for long enough to bring them down, is a challenge. Unfortunately, the environments on show at this stage are a little sparse – hopefully we'll see more scenery detail as the game nears release.

The mech models look far from sparse, in fact, they're by far the most incredibly detailed, meticulous robot battlers ever seen in a videogame. Where before, in-game mechs always looked lacklustre compared to their pre-rendered, intro-movie counterparts, here we see the Xbox 360's visual muscle really being put to use in the individual details on the mechanical colossi, right down to realistic damage and weathering effects. It's easy to see where the developers' passion is, and where the initial time has been spent on the game.

Mech usage is tactical. Choose from a pre-determined selection of purpose built battle mechs: sniper, assault, heavy gunner, scout, commander or defender. Weapon sets will be customisable – expect to see a large variety of assault tools. The mechs move gracefully, with two-legged models loping across the expansive landscape and giant multi-limbed ones picking their way through a destroyed city. The animation and level of detail gives a glimpse of what the Xbox 360 is visually capable of. The power of the walking war machines shines through as bullet and missile hits display very impressive spark effects and collateral environmental damage.

From's experience with *Armored Core* has given it ten years to perfect its art, but with the power of the Xbox 360 it looks as if, with *CHROMEHOUNDS*, the developer will finally be able to realise its vision and create a console-defining depiction of mechanical war…

"THE MECHS ARE THE MOST DETAILED ROBOT BATTLERS WE'VE EVER SEEN IN A VIDEOGAME"

MAKE IT YOURS

In keeping with tradition, From plans to incorporate a wealth of customisation into *CHROMEHOUNDS*. Players will be able to create and tailor their own mechanical warrior from a selection of every component part used in the game, making the scope for creativity practically limitless. Weapon sets will be customisable too, and switching between them is a simple button press away. It's not clear if players will be able to take their own mechs online, as this might present difficult balancing issues, but as people are bound to spend hours building up their robots, From is certain to incorporate a way of showing them off into the title's online functionality.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: From Software
RELEASE: Q2 '06 (US: May '06)
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1 (2-12 Online)

CONCEPT

CHROMEHOUNDS merges the sobriety and intricacy of *Steel Battalion* with the action basis of the *MechAssault* games to deliver a strategic Xbox 360 mech game with stunning visuals.

DEVELOPER PROFILE

FROM SOFTWARE

From Software is more than qualified to create a definitive Xbox 360 mech game – the studio's *Armored Core* titles are beloved by mech obsessives everywhere. From also developed the *Otogi* games for Xbox. *CHROMEHOUNDS* will be the first fruit of the company's publishing partnership with Sega Sammy Holdings.

HISTORY

- **OTOGI 2** 2005 (Xbox)
- **LOST KINGDOMS II** 2003 (GameCube)
- **ARMORED CORE 2** 2002 (PlayStation2)



CHROMEHOUNDS is truly a sight to behold in motion – it's so fluid, despite the robotic stars.

"I THINK THAT CHROMEHOUNDS COULD WELL BE FROM SOFTWARE'S FINEST GAME TO DATE"
MATT WOODLEY, SEGA

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

MECHA MATHS

STEEL BATTALION - CONTROLLER x FABULOUS DETAIL = CHROMEHOUNDS

TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL 4

SOMETHING'S NOT RIGHT HERE…

It's rare for a franchise to drastically improve over time, however, *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell* is one series that has consistently seen improvement with each outing. The first was more a flawed masterpiece than an accomplished classic – its AI problems and imperfect aiming undermined the excellence of the essential concept. *Pandora Tomorrow* went some way to rectify these issues but it was *Chaos Theory* that was the real shining moment for the series. The trademark tension and atmosphere were underpinned by near-perfect AI and controls, and the game was hailed as the final realisation of the series' initial vision – a dark and gripping portrayal of an elite spy's life in the shadows of his enemies. Gone was the frustrating linearity and AI inconsistencies of the first two titles – for many it was difficult to imagine the *Splinter Cell* games getting any better.

The fact that the concept still stands up and proves so entertaining after three very comprehensive games is extraordinary. The game is still unusual for its emphasis on non-lethal incapacitation of enemies and its quietly exhilarating, stealth-based gameplay. So, how does Ubisoft plan to move the series into the next generation? By changing it completely, it would appear.

As anyone who has ever played a *Splinter Cell* game will know (and there can't be many who haven't by now), Sam Fisher is a member of Third Echelon, a US government organisation so secret it denies its own existence. So far, each game has seen him placed in a different part of the world, attempting to diffuse tensions between nations and/or terrorist sects. This time, rather than infiltrating terrorist headquarters, the game begins with Sam Fisher breaking out of prison.

The circumstances surrounding his apparent change of character and motive are not yet fully known but it's likely to be connected to the death of his daughter, as those who completed the previous games will recall. He was sentenced to 20 years in a Kansas prison after being caught and arrested for armed robbery and murder.

WORKING TOGETHER

What made *Pandora Tomorrow* and *Chaos Theory* special was the innovative Spy versus Mercenary online multiplayer mode. *Chaos Theory* featured an excellent co-op effort – online and off – which set it apart from the other Live games, and the four co-op missions remain unique today. It's unlikely that Ubisoft will abandon this history of multiplayer success with *Splinter Cell 4*, although the radical change in setting and circumstance means gameplay will have to be re-thought. Of course, Ubisoft could always trot out the old multiplayer modes again, but that would be a cop-out considering the innovative history of the *Splinter Cell* series.

> "THAT THE SPLINTER CELL CONCEPT STILL STANDS UP SO WELL IS QUITE EXTRAORDINARY"

Clearly, he is no longer a member of Third Echelon and it would appear that his skills will be put to use within a criminal faction. This would necessitate a huge change in the *Splinter Cell* style of play and perhaps an end to the series' preference for the non-lethal treatment of enemies. It's not yet clear if this will upset the game's balance.

The character shown here breaking out with Sam is a member of a criminal organisation called John's Brown Army, who it appears Fisher will be working with. Seeing our man ally with criminals is off-putting but not entirely inconsistent with his character that has been developing in a rather dark direction throughout the last three games. Without access to the government-funded gadgets and technology to which *Splinter Cell* players have become accustomed, it will be interesting to see how the game works.

As further details about *Splinter Cell 4*'s plot are released, we can expect a better indication of the direction Ubisoft is taking the series in. But with a release date of spring 2006, it shouldn't be long before we know more.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360, Xbox, PlayStation2, GameCube, PC
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Spring 2006 (Jap/US: Spring 2006)
GENRE: Stealth/Third-Person Shooter
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

A radically different instalment of the hugely successful and critically acclaimed *Splinter Cell* series, which promises to revolutionise the stealth game genre. Note: *Splinter Cell 4* is only the working title.


Life in the shadows can be tense, especially in the red light districts of Kansas.

TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL 4

XBOX 360/MULTIFORMAT



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Ubisoft is a giant whose in-house projects include both *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six* and *Splinter Cell* franchises, as well as *Prince Of Persia*. The Montreal outfit's previous *Splinter Cell* games are milestones in the evolution of stealth-based third-person videogames, matched only by *Metal Gear Solid* in terms of influence.

HISTORY

- **SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY** 2005 [Multi]
- **RAINBOW SIX 3** 2004 [Multi]
- **SPLINTER CELL** 2002 [Multi]

■ Hopefully, Ubisoft will be using the Xbox 360's power for more than just character detail.

■ Fisher may have gone over to the dark side, but at least he's still a 'good guy'.

"SPLINTER CELL 4 WILL BE EVEN MORE THRILLING AND HEART-POUNDING THAN ITS GROUND-BREAKING PREDECESSORS"

YVES GUILLEMOT, UBISOFT CEO

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

I LOVE TO SNEAK

SPLINTER CELL CHAOS THEORY + A FEW YEARS x ADDED MEANNESS = SPLINTER CELL 4

DAXTER

SCORE ONE FOR THE LITTLE GUY

Oh, the plight of the videogame sidekick. Overlooked, under-appreciated and hugely overshadowed, few would envy their position. Poor little Daxter even had his name dropped from the titles of the two *Jak And Daxter* sequels on the PlayStation2. Happily, former Naughty Dog and Blizzard employees have collaborated to form Ready At Dawn and bring the diminutive co-star to the correspondingly miniature PlayStation Portable in his very own platform adventure.

In a revelation that will raise a few eyebrows in the PSP-owning community, Ready At Dawn has claimed that there won't be any loading screens throughout *Daxter*. Much like its PS2 predecessors and the GameCube game *Starfox Adventures*, *Daxter* constantly streams its environments to avoid the problem of loading times. Naturally, this involves compromising the game's environments slightly – much of the game takes place indoors, in contrast to the PlayStation2 games' wide-open spaces. Thankfully, *Daxter* doesn't compromise on the quality of the visuals; it looks lustrous, in places even surpassing what one would expect from a full-size console.

Despite the fact that Naughty Dog itself is having no hand in *Daxter* on the PSP, the studio has been kind enough to lend Ready At Dawn the rights to the series and plentiful textures, characters, and situations from their stockpiles. Taking place between the original *Jak And Daxter* and its sequel, the game aims to flesh out the circumstances between the first game's happy ending and the second's somewhat darker atmosphere. Daxter takes up a part-time job as an exterminator after being separated from Jak and, armed with his fly swatter and spray gun, embarks on a mission to rescue his friend from prison.

Daxter's spray gun can be used and upgraded in a variety of ways throughout the game, functioning as everything from a hover device to a flamethrower. Daxter's feral nature also makes for some slightly different combat. Although little of this has actually been revealed yet, Ready At Dawn has promised that we will be getting in touch with our animal side as the game progresses. Unsurprisingly, *Daxter* will be a linear platformer – as opposed to hub-based – in fitting with its old-school feel.

Fans of the *Jak And Daxter* series will no doubt feel very comfortable with *Daxter,* and despite the differences this incarnation retains that light-hearted, springy feel that is characteristic of the franchise. The game isn't expected to be finished until the middle of 2006, but that just leaves all the more time for plenty of polishing.



In *Daxter* you'll discover what really happened in between the first two *Jak And Daxter* games.

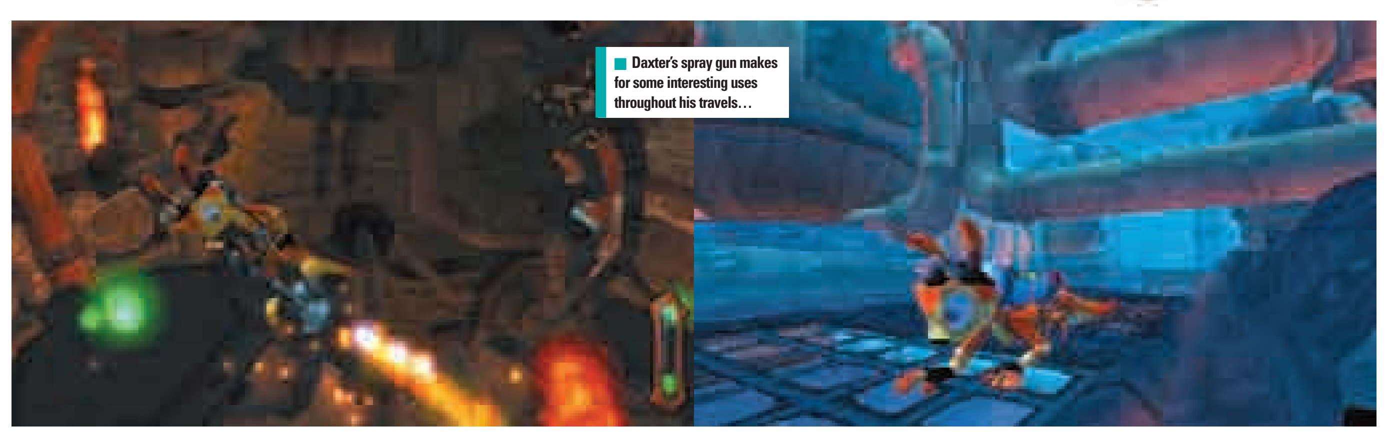
"DAXTER DOESN'T COMPROMISE ON THE QUALITY OF VISUALS. IT LOOKS LUSTROUS"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation Portable
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: SCEE
DEVELOPER: Ready At Dawn
RELEASE: Q2 '06
GENRE: Platformer
PLAYERS: 1 (2-4 Wi-Fi)

CONCEPT

A no-holds-barred, uncompromising pure platformer from Ready At Dawn, a new studio comprised of old Blizzard and Naughty Dog hands.



Daxter's spray gun makes for some interesting uses throughout his travels…


eMag

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2



"BY COMBINING A HUGE SINGLE-PLAYER GAME WITH ENHANCED MODDING TOOLS, WE'RE GOING TO TAKE NEVERWINTER NIGHTS TO THE NEXT LEVEL"

FEARGUS URQUHART, CEO, OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

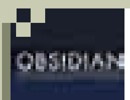
NIGHT TIME

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS + WARLOCKS x IMPROVED MODS = NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2

It's bigger, better and more beautiful than the original. A classic feel, updated.

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2

PC



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Californian RPG creator Obsidian Entertainment was founded just two years ago, before being given the titanic task of making the sequel to Game Of The Year winner *Knights Of The Old Republic*. It will be working closely with BioWare again, to confirm its position as an upcoming and promising new developer.

HISTORY

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC 2 2005 [Multi]



Check out the detail on the animals. Just try not to get into a conversation – it's a wild bore.

MORE A CASE OF NEVER OUT AT NIGHT FOR THE NEXT FEW MONTHS

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Atari
DEVELOPER: Obsidian Entertainment
RELEASE: TBA '06
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1 (2-64 Online)

CONCEPT

The well-received fantasy RPG returns in a sequel that promises even more quests, new locations, thorough character building and superior game customisation.

When *Neverwinter Nights* captured our fantasy adventure hearts three years ago, it did so not only with a compelling dungeon master system but also with the superb Aurora modding tool. This allowed gamers to create and program their own levels and quests. Now, the sequel is on the cards and looking to shake things up even further.

Apart from improvements to the already successful quest editor, an extensive single-player mode is about to hit us with what's being described as deep single character development. You'll also be pleased to hear that the game has been enhanced visually, with smooth yet detailed graphics replacing the standard variety seen in the original. These include tweaked features such as the use of pixel shaders and finer detail on new creatures, including huge, graceful dragons and ferocious wild boars.

The *Dungeons And Dragons* style of gameplay makes a welcome comeback; an essential ingredient considering it's part of what made *Neverwinter Nights* a success in the first place. Dice would be rolled in the background as your warrior swung his axe into the flesh of an orc – you didn't have to worry about writing down masses of numbers just to find out that your attack only took a fraction of the enemy's health. This old-school RPG-element-made-simple returns alongside a similar one-player experience. *Neverwinter Nights 2* will be similar to its predecessor as it's based on that game engine, but as well as increasing game length and size, additions have also been crafted to boost playability.

These include a revengeful storyline that will branch into previous locations and characters, focusing primarily on the main Neverwinter region and a whole new base character class to journey as: the warlock. The first game had NPC warlocks; however, as playable heroes it now means strategies will be altered to maintain combat balance, especially with the similar existing choice of sorcerer. As a warlock, you'll be able to fire strong eldritch blasts at enemies and heal quickly – the only drawback being your admittedly low health bar.

Obsidian and BioWare have kept a classic feel to the game so far, and by drawing inspiration from older titles like *Ultima*, have made *Neverwinter*'s location much more magical and absorbing than before. Set in the Forgotten Realms of the *Dungeons And Dragons* world, updated modelling strengthens the feeling that you're actually there, directly engaged with the land and its lore. Judging by the popular multiplayer found in *Neverwinter Nights*, the developers hope to continue successful online functions, drawing ideas from leading MMO games. More players will host their own larger games alongside others, meaning no servers or monthly fees will be required – just as fans are currently used to.

For those who never played the original, this is traditional RPG gaming with stats, quests and levelling in a slow-paced fantasyland. The *Dungeons And Dragons* element plays a big role in the gameplay and dice-rolling luck aspect. Think *Knights Of The Old Republic* meets *World Of Warcraft* in a free, non-MMORPG environment, based on the original game and you have *Neverwinter Nights 2* wrapped up in orc-ish skin.

"TRADITIONAL RPG GAMING IN MORE VIVID, FANTASY LOCATIONS WILL NO DOUBT BRING FURTHER SWEET ADDICTION"

AURORA RISING

What made *Neverwinter Nights* so continually playable was the ability to input code using the Aurora Toolset modding tool and create unique levels, quests and storylines. These elements have been boosted further for the sequel, with upgrades and enhancements to help streamline the player's personally created wants and needs. Whether this means adding your own dialogue to a string of character-related quests or setting a low-level cap to make dungeons tougher, the option is there to do so. With over 4,000 modifications made to the original, it's hard to see how such a system can be improved, but step-by-step wizards and faster tools for advanced mod-makers mean lastability will be vastly improved.

STARCRAFT GHOST



Surprisingly, the game works just as well from the first-person viewpoint.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Vivendi
DEVELOPER: Blizzard/Swinging Ape
RELEASE: Q2 '06
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1 (2-16 Online)

CONCEPT

A *Starcraft* action game with a third-person slant – NOT the other way around.

"SHE SEEMS TO HAVE AN INVISIBLE TOUCH, YEAH"

If we were anywhere near the salty old sea dogs we aspire to be, we'd have no trouble telling ye a tale of the turbulent development of *Starcraft Ghost*. The troubles, the torment, the fact that it was looking pretty ropey in the hands of original developer Nihilistic; it was so blighted that Blizzard stole it away and started over. Between that and handing the multiplayer duties over to Swinging Ape Studios, the storms surrounding the game have calmed somewhat and the results are far better than we anticipated.

Conceptually, Blizzard's vision – based as it is in the realm of blasting-cum-stealth action rather than real-time strategy, a first for *Starcraft* – remains as it was. The difference this time is that it works. Where before, Nova's stealth abilities felt weak in comparison to messrs Fisher, Snake et al, now she's a master of the shadows – with the abilities to match. Equally, her combat skills have been polished to ensure that her reputation as a killing machine is deserved. She's nimble enough to dart around her enemies while dishing out punishment from a third-person angle, but the game is just as playable from a first-person viewpoint; something that, considering the subtle nuances that split the two, Blizzard should be commended for.

However, the real surprise lies in the multiplayer game. True, it might not be genuinely original – if only because its modes have been ripped from the likes of *Quake III Arena, Unreal Tournament* and beyond – but the execution is certainly solid. The key lies in how Swinging Ape has twisted the very ideals of it: instead of being a tacked-on selection of multiplayer modes with *Starcraft*-styled window dressing, the *Starcraft* elements take precedence over the third-person action. As such, picking your side – Terran, Zerg or Protoss respectively – actually has an effect on how you play the game. For instance, the weapon-based Terrans, with their Warthog-like vehicles and heavy armour classes, handle completely differently to the organic flying and burrowing monsters that are the Zerg. It's a subtle difference, but undoubtedly an important one.

Of course, the jury's still out on when *Starcraft Ghost* will actually see the light of day; Blizzard being Blizzard, it's very much a case of it being ready when it's ready. Thankfully though, we now have far more faith in that event being worth waiting for…



She's a nimble little minx, is our Nova, but even she can't withstand that hulking Marine.

"NO LONGER A WEAK COMBINATION OF STEALTH AND ACTION, STARCRAFT GHOST HAS REALLY STARTED TO COME TOGETHER"


eMag

SAGA OF RYZOM: THE RYZOM RING

AN MMO FOR THE PEOPLE

Any developer entering the massively multiplayer area of game development has quite a job on its hands. Apart from competing with *World Of Warcraft* (which four million people already subscribe to), MMO development is an ongoing process requiring constant updating, observation, new content and storylines. Spending two or three years developing a single game is trying, but finding the motivation to spend another five or six updating and maintaining it requires total dedication to the project.

The evolving nature of MMORPGs makes them rather unsuited to magazine coverage. In the time it can take an article to appear in print, a game and its community can change considerably. *Saga Of Ryzom* in its basic form has been on release since late 2004, but is only now becoming what it was intended to be. As such, *Ryzom Ring* is not so much an expansion pack as it is a new release that shares the environments and community of an existing MMOG – and for this reason, it deserves coverage.

Nevrax's ambitious aim is to introduce player-created scenarios and content to the existing (and still fledgling) *Ryzom* universe, giving its community the chance to flesh out the game with their own sub-plots and challenges. Such a feature could help the huge PC mod community to integrate into the equally massive MMO scene, thereby evolving the MMO entertainment medium by giving players a hand in proceedings. Rejecting the dictatorial attitude of many MMO developers toward their players, Nevrax is keen to discuss everything with its community base – avoiding such uproars as those when the *Star Wars Galaxies* developer changed the levelling system entirely without warning its players, let alone consulting them.

The editing tool uses the Ryzom scenery, monsters, civilisations and main characters. It's complex, but still easier to use than you'd think. The map creator, or dungeon master, runs around the map like a player but can edit things at will and is invisible to monsters and anyone playing.

QUALITY CONTROL

In giving players control over games, there is scope for abuse with large numbers of impossible, ill-conceived or downright facetious scenarios appearing online. Thankfully, Nevrax is introducing a Pioneer system whereby players will have to meet particular standards and follow certain rules in order to display their creations on the website. Any player can create any map, share it with friends and specifically invited other players, but the maps displayed online for general use will have to be up to standard. Players will also only be able to play scenarios within their level range and corresponding ability levels, avoiding spoilers and impossible scenarios.

> "THE MASSIVE PC MOD COMMUNITY COULD INTEGRATE INTO THE EQUALLY HUGE MMO SCENE"

Dungeon masters can set up complex events and edit them in real time as players work their way through their created situation, sending in waves of enemies and putting words into the mouths of NPCs. We can see dedicated players meticulously planning their own side-story for others to experience.

That said, the feature will have to be well thought out if it's to provide a complex enough level of customisation to keep fans happy. Player-created textures and objects will not feature in the game due to copyright issues and the developer's concerns over keeping the integrity of its universe (already potentially limiting the mod community's interest). There are also unavoidable doubts about the capability of *Ryzom's* small community to fully support and exploit the feature. *Ryzom Ring* introduces a new dimension of player involvement in MMO games. Still, there's a chance that player-created scenarios could – and in Nevrax's opinion, will – become standard in MMORPGs, and if that becomes the case, *Saga Of Ryzom* will have a considerable head start.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: France
PUBLISHER: Nevrax
DEVELOPER: Irrational Games
RELEASE: Q1 '06
GENRE: MMORPG
PLAYERS: Massively Multiplayer

CONCEPT

The Ryzom Ring attempts to introduce player-created content to the MMO playground, with the aim of merging the PC MMO and mod communities.



Clearly, being the master of your own dungeon will please plenty of MMO players out there.

SAGA OF RYZOM: THE RYZOM RING

PC

DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Nevrax is a small-scale studio hidden away in the winding streets of Paris. Founded by David Cohen-Corval, its only project so far has been *Saga Of Ryzom* and with several more episodes and content expansion plans in the works, it looks as if the game will keep them busy for the forseeable future.

HISTORY

■ **SAGA OF RYZOM**, 2004 (PC)



■ This kind of player involvement could mark a new direction for MMO gaming.

"WE BELIEVE THAT THE PLAYER-EMPOWERING NATURE OF THE RYZOM RING IS GROUND-BREAKING AND WE HOPE IT WILL CHANGE THE WAY MMGS ARE PLAYED FOREVER"

DAVID COHEN-CORVAL, NEVRAX

INFECTED



Did you ever play *Beast Busters*? Ah, the memories…

Poor old Santa – clearly, even he isn't immune to the virus…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PSP
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Majesco
DEVELOPER: Planet Moon Studios
RELEASE: TBA '06 (US: 10 November)
GENRE: Third-Person Shooter
PLAYERS: 1 (2-8 Wi-Fi)

CONCEPT

Frenetic, zombie blast-'em-up with an interesting multiplayer where players infect each other's PSPs with their own avatar.

SPREAD THE WORD

In the absence of the announcement of a *Resident Evil* game for the PlayStation Portable, those in need of zombie-related action on their shiny new handhelds will be glad to know that *Infected* is nearing its US release. Although the game's frantic blasting is more akin to a *House Of The Dead* lightgun game than to Capcom's atmospheric series, there's still enough here to drum up some interest.

Set in New York at Christmas, you play a cop sent out to battle civilians infected with a mysterious virus. Using a 'viral gun' you must use your own blood to battle the infected, then destroy the carriers before they spread to other areas and infect more civilians. Each level is a race against the clock to blast those nasty zombies away.

The single-player also features a few hidden characters in the form of the hateful avatars of members of Slipknot. Much as we loathe said band for what it did to our fingers in *Amplitude's* Insane mode, their image and music supposedly fits with the game's gory, gratuitous, all-out violent style of play. The soundtrack includes tunes from them as well as 'delights' from the likes of El Niño and Fear Factory.



The game's multiplayer, however, is the feature that's really being pushed by the developer. In multiplayer, you must create an on-screen avatar and should you win the match, that avatar will infect the loser's PSP and the infected in the single-player will take on the form of the victor. The only way to get rid of the infection is to pass it on, meaning that players can theoretically spread their image across the world.

Of course, being a third-person shooter means that *Infected* could suffer from the PSP's lack of a second analogue stick. Planet Moon has tried to compensate for this by using the shoulder buttons to perform 180° turns – it works well in the game, but even so it might not be enough. Chains of kills can also be notched up, triggering mass explosions as the infected shower gore all over the New York streets.

While no UK release date has yet been confirmed, it's likely that THQ will pick up the rights to *Infected* following its European deal to publish other Majesco games. Due to its Christmas setting, it certainly would be suited to a holiday release… although gamers eager for some frenetic arcade shooting action can always import the US version (if Sony will let them, of course).

"NOTCH UP CHAINS OF KILLS AND MASS EXPLOSIONS WILL SHOWER THE CITY WITH GORE"


eMag

ANIMAL CROSSING: WILD WORLD

NINTENDO TEACHES US TO GRUNT AND SQUEAK AND SQUAWK WITH THE ANIMALS

DETAILS

FORMAT: Nintendo DS
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: 31 March '06 (US: 5 December)
GENRE: Life Simulation
PLAYERS: 1 (2-4 via Wi-Fi)

COMMENT

Make friends, run errands, write letters, go fishing, live a life; all in the palm of your hand. It's the best non-game game ever…

HISTORY

Animal Crossing originally began on the N64, although timing soon saw it moved onto the GameCube for its initial launch. Why we had to wait nearly three years for a European version, God only knows…

***Animal Crossing* isn't a game. Not really.** Not in the conventional sense. There's no ending to work toward, no grand reward awaiting you at the conclusion of your adventure. No objectives are set in stone, no monumental metaphorical mountains for you to climb or hurdles for you to straddle. There aren't even any special moves, power attacks or anything else pertaining to violence (unless you consider hitting a fellow villager on the head with a bug-catching net, that is). And yet, the original GameCube version – the import version, naturally, as opposed to the three-years-too-late PAL release – kept us captivated for over 18 months, the longest we've concurrently played a videogame in our lives. 18 months. That's a very long time to be listening to bears, goats and dogs talk in that grin-inducing Animalese wittering.

Of course, this is testament to Nintendo's efforts to take gameplay in a new direction, away from the generic action games that currently mire the shelves. *Nintendogs* may have been many people's first taste of the 'experience with non-linear goals' approach to gaming, but Nintendo was doing it long before with *Animal Crossing*. And now, as its new DS Wi-Fi Connection service launches worldwide, it's about to do it again with *Animal Crossing: Wild World* – the handheld evolution of its original vision. But then, what makes it think that people will take to the game in the same way that they flocked to its recent pet-'em-up?

"I think it's because the game contains features that attract various kinds of people," says Katsuya Eguchi, producer on *Wild World* and the mind behind the creation of *Animal Crossing*. "In the game, you can enjoy and experience what you are interested in right now or what you used to do in your childhood, which is like a parallel world. However, it doesn't mean everything is too realistic; I would say it's an experience of everyday life in the mysterious world. Another reason why it entertains people, I think, is because people set up their own goals, even though they're not forced to. Someone may want to save money as much as possible after repaying a house loan, while others may want to fill the village with fruit trees."

It's true that in terms of sheer freedom to do whatever you

ANIMAL CROSSING: WILD WORLD
NINTENDO DS

DEVELOPER PROFILE

He might not look it, but Katsuya Eguchi is a driving force behind Nintendo's new gaming philosophy – as one of the bods responsible for the *Animal Crossing* concept, his influence within Nintendo's Entertainment Analysis and Development department (EAD) is helping to revitalise the way we look at gaming today.

HISTORY

- **ANIMAL CROSSING** 2001 [GameCube]
- **YOSHI'S STORY** 1997 [N64]
- **WAVE RACE 64** 1996 [N64]



For the first time, you can now visit towns with your friends – cue lots of rude messages.

"FOR A GAME WITH NO SET GOALS AND NO REAL ENDING, IT'S AMAZING HOW ADDICTIVE ANIMAL CROSSING: WILD WORLD IS"

please, *Wild World* has no real equal. Yes, so there are at least distant goals that can be achieved should you choose to put your mind to them. Initially, the biggest concern is that of paying off the hefty loan you're landed with upon arriving in your randomly generated town, although beyond that lies everything from helping fill the local museum with exhibits, amassing complete collections of 'things' (insects, fish, furniture, whatever) to maintaining the environment of the whole village. The twist, however, is that if you want, you don't have to do any of it. Obviously, doing such tasks offers its own rewards but if you'd rather spend the day rearranging the layout of your house, going fishing, picking fruit or just chatting with the locals… well, that's entirely up to you.

It's not just a case of 'how' you play the game, however, but also 'when' – tying itself directly to your DS's on-board clock, *Wild World's* real-time aspect is another reason why it's so easy to keep coming back. Day turns to night, seasons change, events (both real, like Christmas and Halloween, and fictional) are held, special visitors pass through to pay you a visit… if you don't visit your town regularly, you could potentially miss out on something important. But then, this is nothing new – had you played the GameCube version, you could have been experiencing the delights of the Harvest Moon festival or taking part in the weekly fishing tournaments throughout June.

Instead, *Wild World* makes changes elsewhere to revitalise the concept; villagers now have hobbies, for example, so you can find yourself helping someone find particular items or performing tasks. Elements of the previous game, such as the wishing well or post office, have been combined to form a new town hall, your one-stop place for all town-related tomfoolery. Even shopping has more purpose now, with the addition of Sainsbury's-style Nook points – the more you buy, the higher your ranking and the more Tom passes the savings on to you. From new items such as the Slingshot (added to allow you to literally shoot things out of the sky… or, to be more specific, the top screen) to new locations such as The Roost – a coffee shop run by a rambunctious pigeon called Brewster – and the Observatory where you can create your own star constellations, *Wild World's* development has seen plenty of love ▷

YOU BOTTLER

Possibly our favourite part of *Wild World* over the original GameCube game is the introduction of Bottle Mail – a more indirect but far more exciting method of communication. You simply buy a Bottle Mail kit from Tom Nook's shop, write a letter, pop it in the bottle and toss it in the nearest river where it gets washed out to sea. After that, it's like a chain. Linking up with a friend transfers the bottle to their cartridge but doesn't necessarily mean they'll be the one to find it; instead, the bottle passes from cartridge to cartridge via wireless link-up, the more discreet Tag mode (which quietly transfers data to nearby players while your DS is in Sleep mode) or online Wi-Fi play until it eventually washes up on someone's beach. Depending on how prolific your link-up play is, it could literally turn up anywhere in the world…

"YOU CAN TURN ON ANYWHERE AND ANYTIME, AND I BELIEVE THIS WILL BE A SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT FOR THIS GAME"
KATSUYA EGUCHI, PRODUCER, NINTENDO EAD

MEET THE FAMILY

With so many characters available, much of the fun in *Animal Crossing: Wild World* is the random element of not knowing who you'll meet in your town. That said, every town features a few select faces that can help make your life easier, so it's worth making sure you know who they are…

CELESTE

A newcomer to the *Animal Crossing* world, Blathers' sister takes care of the museum's new Observatory on the top floor. If you ask her nicely, she'll teach you how to create your own constellations and share them with your friends. She's also partial to flirting, the little minx… sorry, owl.

COPPER AND BOOKER

Once *Animal Crossing's* dutiful policemen, now the guardians of the gate – the place to go when you feel like visiting the towns of your friends. Booker also looks after your town's Lost and Found department, so it's wise to check in regularly and see what booty you can claim as your own.

TOM NOOK

The Arthur Daley of the game; the kind of raccoon that you wouldn't buy a used car from, let alone a whole house. Tom will happily sell you his own mother if it means making a few bells, especially since your patronage means he can upgrade his own store in turn – best keep a close eye this one.

KK SLIDER

Animal Crossing's resident beatnik and the man to turn to when you want to relax; KK usually appears in town once a week to spread his love for music, and chatting to him rewards you with tunes for the stereo in your house. Expect to see him taking the stage in The Roost…

PUBLISHER PROFILE

Nintendo

■ While third-party publishers still have a way to go before they maximise the potential of the DS, Nintendo has already proven that the handheld is far from just a gimmick. In attempting to diversify exactly what our understanding of gameplay is, we could be on the verge of a whole new era of gaming…

HISTORY

- **MARIO KART DS** 2005 [NDS]
- **NINTENDOGS** 2005 [NDS]
- **KIRBY POWER PAINTBRUSH** 2005 [NDS]

■ Visiting other people's homes is usually an exercise in learning the ills of interior decorating.

"THE ONLINE PLAY REALLY EXPANDS THE WORLD, AS IT BRINGS A COMMUNITY ELEMENT MISSING FROM THE GAMECUBE VERSION"

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

IT'S A WILD, WILD, WILD WORLD

ANIMAL CROSSING + MINIATURE x NO WIRES = ANIMAL CROSSING: WW

ANIMAL CROSSING: WILD WORLD

NINTENDO DS



Going fishing, mutilating the flora and fauna… there's so much that's made better with friends.

and attention from Eguchi and his team. Clearly, this is more than just a simple port…

"It was actually quite a job, but at the same time, a lot of fun," admits Eguchi. "Naturally, we didn't have to start from the very beginning because we'd already created the GameCube version; however, the Nintendo DS is so different from GameCube in terms of control and the double screens. In particular, we put a lot of effort into making use of the DS's functions efficiently. With the controls, for instance, we wanted to make it more comfortable and reduce stress by utilising the touch screen feature. We experimented over and over again so that we could create a intuitive control system; the result is that you can play only with the stylus, just the buttons and D-pad or a mixture of both."

The stylus control takes some getting used to after years of guiding our avatar around with a controller. But with practice you'll be running around, shaking trees and digging up treasure with the best of 'em. The touch screen does make tasks like writing letters, accessing your inventory and creating clothing designs that much easier, although again it's a subtle change. That isn't to say that the DS doesn't bring anything new to the *Animal Crossing* table – with online and link-up play now forming a core part of the experience, the game's been opened up in the way that players of the original felt it should have been.

"We were planning to develop a version of *Animal Crossing* with network functions for GameCube using the broadband adapter," reveals Eguchi, "but once we realised the possibilities for the DS Wi-Fi Connection, we changed our plan and started developing the game for the Nintendo DS instead. It didn't take so much time to come up with the idea that people gather in one village and play together through wireless connection. Since players gather at the same time, we also thought they would like to think about what they wear, how they co-ordinate themselves better. So, we added more items and elements, such as being able to choose your hairstyle or wear a hat."

While we're naturally looking forward to playing *Animal Crossing* in a new form, we can't deny that it's this prospect – to actually play with other people, rather than having to resort to lengthy forum posts, risk confusion over Present Codes and even send our memory cards through the post – that has us genuinely excited. That we won't actually be playing in the traditional sense is even more intriguing; instead, we'll be sharing experiences, enjoying good company and maybe even forming new friendships along the way.

A friendship simulator? We've certainly of heard worse ideas…

"PLAYERS MOVE INTO A LIVING, BREATHING WORLD INSIDE THE DS AND THEN INVITE THEIR FRIENDS TO VISIT FROM ANYWHERE ON EARTH, THROUGH WIRELESS LAN OR WI-FI CONNECTION"

NINTENDO PRESS RELEASE

HOWDY STRANGER

Despite being an online title, *Wild World* isn't set up so you can wander into the town of literally anyone around the world – naturally there are rules and regulations to prevent the kind of wanton cyber terrorism (or at least tree cutting, hole digging and other disruption) that such a game could suffer from. By registering with Nintendo Wi-Fi, you're given a Friend code that ties your DS and copy of the game together; if you want someone to come and visit your town, you simply give them the Friend code and then arrange a time for both of you to be playing simultaneously. These codes can be bookmarked in the game for easy access once you've entered them, so your friends are only a few stylus prods away – handy once you've built up a healthy collection of visitors.

SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

URBAN REIGN

REIGNING BLOOD

Format:	PlayStation2
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	SCEE
Developer:	Namco
Genre:	Beat-'Em-Up
Players:	1-4



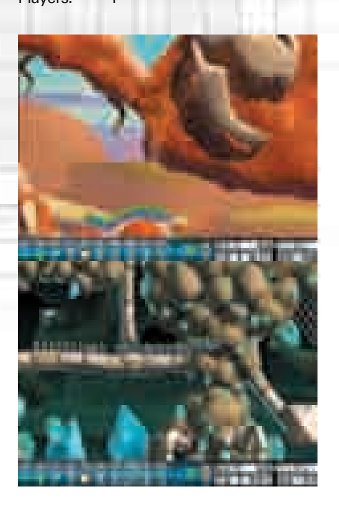
We've had *Beat Down: Fists Of Vengeance*, we've had *The Warriors* and now, courtesy of Namco and SCEE, we have *Urban Reign*. The scrolling beat-'em-up has experienced something of a renaissance recently and keen to capitalise on this, Namco is preparing to deliver what actually feels like the best example yet. The game's USP is tag team battling; at all times you're accompanied by a companion, allowing for some bone-crunching double team moves. Featuring 100 missions and an amazing 60 playable characters – including Paul Phoenix and Marshall Law – *Urban Reign* both looks and plays better than some of its predecessors. Out already in the US, we've got high hopes for this solid-looking brawler.

RELEASE: Q1 '06

LEMMINGS

LET'S GO!

Format:	PlayStation Portable
Origin:	UK
Publisher:	SCEE
Developer:	Team 17
Genre:	Puzzle
Players:	1



Everyone loves those little green-haired fellows. It's true. In fact, if you were to ask the average person on the street what a lemming actually looks like, we'd wager good money that they wouldn't answer, 'a gerbil'. So it's good news all round as a lovely hi-resolution version of the Team 17 classic is winging its way onto the PlayStation Portable. The only concern we have about this prospect is the potential lack of accuracy in its controls; the analogue nub is a pleasant enough feature, but it'll never match a mouse. However, we're sure Team 17 has already thought about this and with the inclusion of a level editor and those lovely shiny lemmings, this could be an essential PlayStation Portable title.

RELEASE: FEBRUARY '06

CALL OF JUAREZ

SO… MANY… WESTERNS

Format:	PC
Origin:	Poland
Publisher:	TBA
Developer:	Techland
Genre:	First-Person Shooter
Players:	1



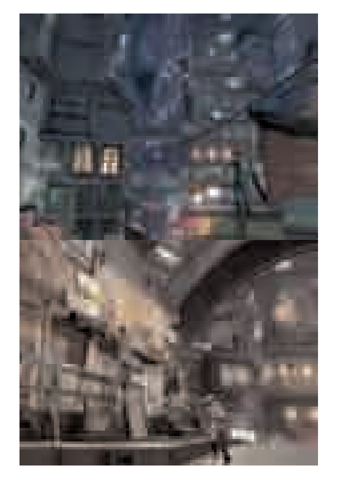
As if *GUN* and *Darkwatch* weren't enough, we can now expect another jaunt into the Wild West next year, thanks to Techland, the developer behind *Trackmania*. It's already looking like pretty standard Wild West fare – the inclusion of bullet time (which, out of interest, was actually invented in Texas circa 1882) comes as no surprise. However, no other Western-themed game allows you to play as a preacher and stroll through a town preaching 'the truth'. Quite how this will affect the gameplay remains to be seen, but it's always fun to try new things. With some 'cracking' wood physics (sorry) and lovely graphics, *Call Of Juarez* seems to be the sleeper hit that everyone's always wishing for.

RELEASE: Q1 '06

THE CITY OF METRONOME

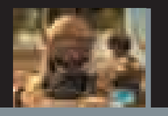
TICK FOLLOWS TOCK

Format:	Xbox 360
Origin:	Sweden
Publisher:	TBA
Developer:	Team Tarsier
Genre:	Adventure
Players:	1



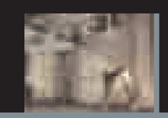
Now, here's something a bit different. Cast your eyes over the stunning, Burton-esque cityscapes in these screenshots; they do look interesting, but certainly not as interesting as the game's somewhat 'out there' concept. Essentially, *The City Of Metronome* is all about sound; you can record and manipulate any noise heard in the game and then re-use that sound to work your way through the story. Using loud, destructive audio it's possible to fight off evil hordes, while soothing music will calm people… clearly, Team Tarsier is promising a wealth of possibilities. Whether it works is another matter, but we certainly like the combination of a dystopian cityscape and an anti-capitalism storyline… very *Dark City*.

RELEASE: TBA '06



DELAYED – Ghost Recon: AW (Xbox 360)

Ubisoft has pushed back the release of the highly promising *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter* until February next year to further improve its development. We don't mind, so long as the results are worth the wait.



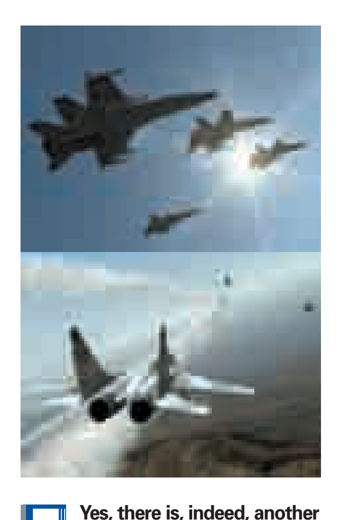
DELAYED – S.T.A.L.K.E.R. Shadow Of Chernobyl (PC)

Will it ever see the light of day? The groundbreaking first-person shooter has been in development seemingly forever and has now been pushed back once again. Expect this to surface in the middle of next year. Maybe…

ACE COMBAT ZERO: THE BELKAN WAR

ZERO MEANS PREQUEL, YES?

Format:	PlayStation2
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	SCEE
Developer:	Namco
Genre:	Flight Sim
Players:	1 (Multiplayer TBA)



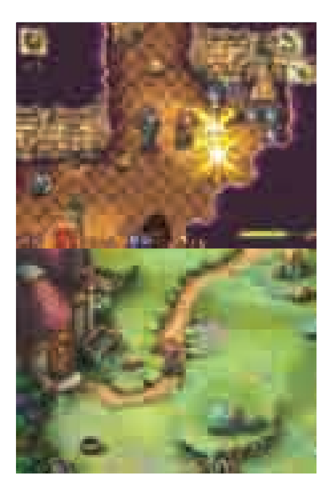
Yes, there is, indeed, another one – although this sixth game in the high-flying *Ace Combat* series is set 15 years before the events of number five. *The Belkan War* will have many planes in it and the Japanese will love it more than everyone else… certain things are a given when it comes to Namco's now legendary flight sim series. The reason these games keep getting made is because they are actually rather excellent arcade shooters. New for the latest version however, are enemy pilots with unique personalities – you'll have to learn how each of your opponents fights before being able to take them down. No doubt fans of the series will be happy, while everyone else will carry on regardless.

RELEASE: TBA '06

SEIKEN DENSETSU: CHILDREN OF MANA

SENT FROM HEAVEN

Format:	Nintendo DS
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	Square Enix
Developer:	Next Entertainment
Genre:	Role-Playing Game
Players:	1 (Multiplayer TBA)



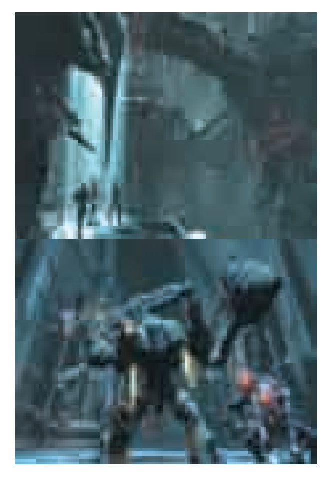
The RPG community was in rapture after the Tokyo Game Show and the very first video of the latest in Square Enix's much-loved *Mana* saga. As has come to be expected, it looks lovely in that lush, semi-top-down role-playing game kind of way. However, Square is being extremely coy with the details. The video shows a tree. A tree covered in trees. In a forest. Aside from that and some exquisite screens that'll look familiar to any fan of the *Seiken Densetsu* series though, that's it. Quite how *Children Of Mana* will use the Nintendo DS's unique abilities is also anyone's guess at the moment, but we're obviously hoping for something a little more imaginative than simple menu navigation.

RELEASE: TBA '06
(JAPAN: 30 MARCH '06)

TOO HUMAN

HUMAN AFTER ALL

Format:	Xbox 360
Origin:	Canada
Publisher:	Microsoft
Developer:	Silicon Knights
Genre:	Action Adventure
Players:	1



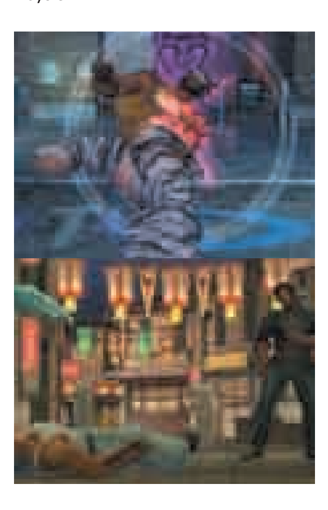
Hopes are particularly high for Microsoft's collaboration with Canadian developer Silicon Knights. Powered by the almighty oomph of the Unreal Engine 3, *Too Human* is already looking incredible – a far cry from its N64 and PSone roots. Pitched as an action adventure game, Silicon Knights has promised a fusion of melee and ranged combat with a chaining combo system. Sounds like something more in the *Devil May Cry* mould than your traditional action adventure, which will always goes down well around these parts… oh yes. Graphically, *Too Human* appears every bit as 'next generation' as we expect it to look – we just hope and pray that the gameplay is there to help keep the visuals afloat…

RELEASE: TBA '06

THE CON

IT'S MOST DEFINITELY ON

Format:	PlayStation Portable
Origin:	US
Publisher:	SCEE
Developer:	In-House
Genre:	Beat-'Em-Up
Players:	1-2



It's not really all that often that a 3D fighter turns up and can actually be described as 'original'; however, Sony's *The Con* can lay claim to doing exactly that. Essentially it's a fairly standard 3D brawler, but it comes with a twist: you bet on all your fights and predict whether you'll come out victorious or vanquished. If you think it sounds strange, that's because it is. You can't simply bet on yourself to lose and then put the PSP on the chair and nip off to make a cup of tea; it has to seem real, hence the 'take a fall' option. Play the bookies off against one another or take everyone out with brutal punishment? *The Con* looks to explore avenues not yet seen in the genre and we'll be interested to see how it plays out.

RELEASE: TBA (US: OUT NOW)


498090
1
MPL
2
LSR



Anything you can dodge, I can dodge better **Super Aleste, SNES (Toho) 1992**

The videogaming landscape is shifting and the land of the rising Sun is in danger of falling off the map. How did everything change so quickly and how much upheaval is yet to come?



Death of an Empire



The world is shrinking. Where once the countries of the world largely existed in isolation of each other – certainly culturally speaking – now, thanks to the internet and other fruits of the modern world, nowhere is out of reach of the dreaded spectre of global marketing. For videogames, this move toward globalisation is causing upheaval such as the industry has never seen. It isn't heading for gaming multi-culturalism but rather is travelling headlong in the opposite direction.

In the 8-bit era (and into much of the 16-bit years) the idea of a global publisher didn't really exist. Specialist publishers such as US Gold imported American titles into the UK and Europe, and Japanese titles were more likely to be converted by a European devco for native formats such as the Commodore 64 or Spectrum than released on their original format. There was little return traffic – a situation which has remained largely unchanged.

In the early days of gaming, the three big territories worked independent of each other, both in terms of game style and formats supported. America got into the PC early and had little time for other home computers, while Japan stuck to its own consoles and games. Europe, in the meantime, was never properly weaned off the home computer until the beginning of the 32-bit era. Because so many European-developed titles were for home computer formats – the Spectrum, Commodore 64, Atari ST or Amiga – home-grown titles made little impact on the rest of the world and subsequently enjoyed little prospect of carrying on into the next generation.

Instantly identifiable European titles such as *Elite, Another World, Back To Skool, Captain Blood, Head Over Heels, Hunter, Lords Of Midnight* and *Speedball* have few modern-day equivalents, either in terms of sequels or stylistic progeny. "It comes down to games being very expensive to develop and everyone trying to minimise their risk," explains Matthew Woodley, Creative Director at Sega Europe. "This leads to staleness and stagnation. Unless we see some innovation we'll never convince more people to play games."

Although significant sellers in their own time, it would be largely impossible to imagine a modern mass audience finding any of the above games attractive today. Instead, these often abstract, experimental styles of games were cast aside while gamers were happy to subsist purely on titles from Japan and America. "Developers and publishers initially develop games for their own main market. What we would like to see are more European publishers releasing games that are geared toward Europe, and expand that over to the rest of the world," says Anon, a localiser of Japanese games at a prominent American publisher, who wishes to remain unnamed.

Sadly, it seems that Europe's chance to maintain its own cultural identity in games has long since passed but now, as the global market



Beyond Good and Evil

Stylistic and elegant – all the trademarks of Michel Ancel.

Fable

Just short of expectations, but still a very stylish UK game.

The Movies

Poking fun at Hollywood? It must be a European game…

contracts further, it seems as if Japan is also in serious danger of having its developers pushed out of the equation.

Japanese developers dominated the 16-bit and certainly the 32-bit era. Almost all of the most popular franchises were borne of Japanese developers, all of the console manufactures were Japanese and there seemed little likelihood of that ever changing – not least because everyone (consumers and publishers included) was largely happy with the arrangement. But then the Japanese economy started to waver and the home audience for games began to shrink. Developers from the east became more conservative and all of a sudden there was an opening for a western console manufacturer.

Go west

"There are several reasons for the declining Japanese market," claims Anon. "One is mobile phones. Unlike the west, the majority of students in Japan spend most of their money on their phones. If these students spend £30 to £60 every month on bills they're obviously not going to have enough money for games. However, the greatest challenge facing the Japanese market is the lack of price protection by the publishers," he asserts. "Unlike the west, retailers in Japan take on the entire burden





Black & White 2

We suspect only Mr Molyneux could have dreamt up this.

"Japanese gaming is losing its identity..."

when it comes to price reductions. Publishers are not obligated to pay for any price cuts regarding their games. Therefore, in order to minimise risk, retailers tend to order large quantities of brand name titles and fewer newcomer titles. Developers know this, and so keep making sequels rather then innovative new titles, thus steering new consumers away. It's bad karma."

"Japan is still the Hollywood of videogaming," argues Mike Fischer, director of global product marketing at Xbox, and the man brought in to lead the marketing efforts for Xbox in Japan. "Since powerful software is the key to Xbox 360, the entry of Japan's leading game publisher is considered a great sign of support. Ultimately our success in Asia should be the result of great content from the west and Japan, as well as great local content, too."

The influence of the Xbox on the current market is often exaggerated, particularly by the somewhat biased American press, but it stands as a perfect example of Japan's waning influence in videogames. The Xbox may have only just outsold the GameCube worldwide but in America, it has come very close to equalling the PlayStation2 in the last two years. This suggests a very close Mega Drive vs SNES-style battle between the Xbox 360 and PlayStation3 in the US.

The rest of the world has been less convinced by the Xbox however, and in Japan it has proved about as popular as a nasty case of flu. Although Microsoft will be hoping to see greater divergence in hardware choices in the next generation, it's currently the style of videogames themselves which differentiates the markets. How much influence Microsoft has actually had on this is open to debate, but it's increasingly apparent that nowadays western games only sell in the west, Japanese games only sell in Japan and never the twain shall meet.

A matter of taste

Game tastes in each territory have generally remained static. America tends to enjoy sports titles and action games grounded in realism, while a significant minority market exists for strategy and role-playing titles on the PC. Europe is largely the same, albeit with an even stronger following for PC titles on the continent, and a proportional dislike for them in the UK. It's a sad fact that Britain has the narrowest taste in videogames in the world. One theory as to why this might be is that, with the sudden removal of British and European games by the end of the

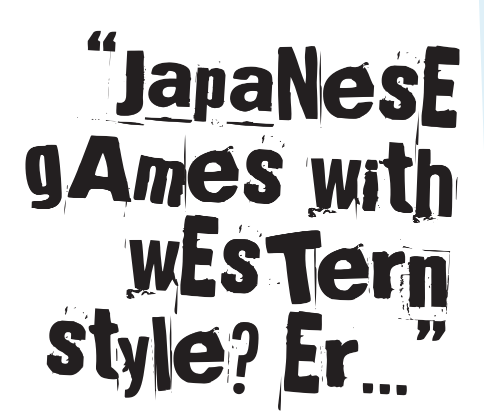
16-bit era, mainstream gamers had no entry point into more abstract fare – it's one thing to take a risk on a quirky British title but quite another to experiment with something comparably odd from Japan.

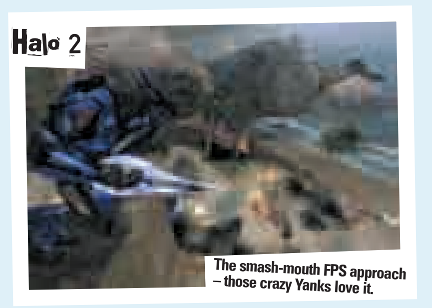
Although Japan also has a love for action and sports titles, it's far less concerned with realism and simulation. Indeed, in Japan the term 'simulation' refers to strategy titles, which in themselves have a strong role-playing influence in Japanese-developed titles. The PC is almost non-existent as a platform, and first-person games of any kind have never proved successful, which suggests just what a difficult sell the Xbox was, aside from Microsoft's awkward attempts at marketing in Japan.

With Open Arms

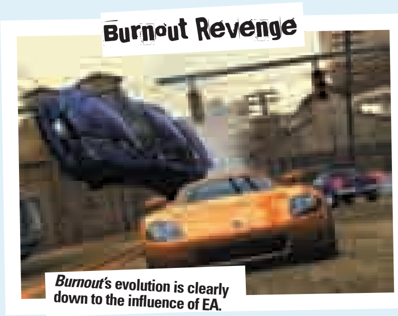
Despite this literal world of difference in game tastes, western titles are slowly gaining acceptance in Japan. Although the average Japanese gamer would still rather play a *Rise Of The Robots* vs *Mortal Kombat* team-up than touch an FPS, the draw of more violent western games such as *Grand Theft Auto* has started to gain significance. Although there are notable exceptions, Japanese games don't generally feature realistic violence to the level of *Manhunt* or *GTA*. The novelty of such concepts has reaped major rewards for Capcom recently, as its import of the *GTA* series has racked up over 390,000 unit sales for *Vice City* alone – enough for it to be regarded a moderate hit in Japan, ahead of some of Capcom's own titles. It even led to one area of Japan giving the game its highest possible age rating – the first time such a rating has ever been given for violence rather than sexual content. A stark contrast to the *Hentai* titles, *Pachinko* simulators, dating sims and horse racing games that constitute just a few of the Japanese peculiarities that most western gamers are barely even aware of.

Woodley is not convinced of any real change, "I don't really think we can say that many western titles have made a significant impact. If you take a look at what the Japanese consumer is into, as a whole we're poles apart

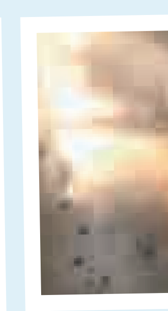




The smash-mouth FPS approach – those crazy Yanks love it.



Burnout's evolution is clearly down to the influence of EA.



Challenge Everything

IF THERE'S ONE company that personifies the western videogames hegemony, it's Electronic Arts. The company is constantly represented in the sales charts on both sides of the Atlantic and makes more money than every other third-party publisher combined. And yet even this behemoth is but a bit player in the east. Considering Japan's usual dislike for the FPS and the game's borderline xenophobia, it's somewhat inexplicable that EA's biggest success this generation has been *Medal Of Honor: Rising Sun*. Other titles such as *FIFA*, *Need For Speed* and *The Sims* can only shuffle about in the lower reaches of the Japanese top 20. There should be no assumption that the Japanese gaming public has any higher standards than the rest of the world (after all, they do keep buying *Dynasty Warriors* year in, year out) and one can only wonder what success *Pachinko Simulator 2007* or *Horse Racing 2007* might one day reap if EA ever chose to properly address the Japanese market.

in style, gameplay and construction. But I do feel that some western developers have made better in-roads in creating content that works in both markets. The markets are where they have been for quite a while – the odd exceptional title will work in both markets, but generally not."

The creeping acceptance of western games in Japan hasn't been a major influence on Japanese publishers yet, but the failure of their traditional franchises and genres in the west most certainly has. This is an important change because Japanese publishers traditionally create games for their home market first, with the rest of the world a secondary concern. The size of the Japanese games market, in proportion to its population, far exceeds any other country and this allows publishers to create games that sell only in their home market and yet still generate adequate returns. This is the primary reason why so many Japanese games do not get released in the west – the publisher knows it will make its money back at home without the financial risk of modifying and marketing the game for western release.

"Unfortunately, the Japanese market is conservative," complains Anon. "Original games have a difficult time selling. However, new games like *Mushi King* and *Katamari Damacy* are making an appearance in the charts and I believe that the Japanese market is slowly moving toward innovation again."

With the Japanese economy still in trouble, overall game sales have steadily decreased for the last four years. It may recover of course, but in the meantime Japanese publishers are of the opinion that there's real money to be made abroad. This change in direction can be observed in subtle ways such as through the Paris setting of Capcom's *Onimusha 3* or Square Enix's partnership with Disney for *Kingdom Hearts*. Then there are the more blatant indictors such as Sega's move to acquire and sign-up western developers so that they can publish distinctly un-Sega-like games like *Condemned*, *Spartan: Total Warrior* and *Football Manager*. Other famous Japanese publishers with already distinct styles of their own have acted likewise with Namco signing up the Gollop brothers for *Rebelstar: Tactical Command* and Flagship Studio's *Hellgate: London*, as well as developing home-grown games such as *Urban Reign* and *Frame City Killer* which have clearly been designed to look as much like western titles as possible.

Broad Strokes

"The Japanese games market has developed, not necessarily decreased," claims Woodley. "The difference is in the delivery. Mobile phone gaming use in Japan should be an indicator of how to attract the mass market. The issue our 'traditional' industry has is understanding what the consumer wants – not everyone wants to spend 18 hours a day dressed in tights and running round a forest."

Of course, the danger with all this is that Japan – the spiritual home of videogames – will lose its cultural gaming identity and those uniquely Japanese games will become as rare as those uniquely European ones. Since neither console manufacturers nor the publishers themselves are charities it's unsurprising that



Can the FPS genre become even more base? *Black* suggests so.



A Japanese game, but western style… and it's rubbish. Bah.

Capcom took a massive risk in making *killer7* so stylised…

Cute robots – not exactly what we'd call typically western.



artistic concerns come a distinct second to staying afloat. If Japanese games are becoming more westernised, then gaming itself will be in danger of falling into an abyss of identi-kit racing games, FPS and sports titles, a problem that few publishers or developers, on either side of the world, seem interested in addressing.

"I think we've seen that more niche-like games can be profitable," argues Woodley. "I certainly hope we carry on looking at all genres as I believe there is a great deal of innovation still to come." Instead of trying to maintain current genres (or resurrect those like the graphic adventure and flight sim that have already fallen by the wayside) the only real answer at the moment seems to be to give up on established formulas altogether. Although approaching the problem from very different angles, both Nintendo and Microsoft appear to believe that the only way to keep the videogames market expanding is to go beyond casual gamers and try to attract those that have never been interested in games at all.

Flip Reverse

"In the past, developers offered consumers whatever games they wanted to, but today it's the opposite," says Anon. "Now the consumer has a say in what they want to play." What's worrying is that publishers have not sought to attract their newly imagined audiences by adapting existing formulas or making current genres more accessible, but rather by creating the infamous new genre of 'non-games'.

Nintendo has already had considerable success with *Nintendogs* and *Brain Training* on the Nintendo DS, while Microsoft is still serious about promoting its Xbox Live Arcade service of *Minesweeper* and *Solitaire*-style titles. At E3, Microsoft even went so far as to suggest that non-gamers could be attracted to gaming through the creation of mod-style content such as in-game clothing designs or decals.

"I feel that far too many games have been made by developers just for themselves," says Woodley. "Just because developer X has lived with a game for three years and can make the character dance to their tune at the touch of a button, it doesn't mean that everyone else can immediately. We should never dumb down the challenge, but should manage expectations more and understand that not everyone is equally able. New processing power will allow us to do this soon…" Such blasphemous ideas of the future mean that the next generation of gaming is going to be very interesting. With many publishers already worrying that the graphical leap from this generation to the next will be largely imperceptible to the general public, the idea that the variety of games available to tempt them in will be shrinking seems one fraught with obvious danger.

"As a third-party publisher, I believe the only way to attract new audiences is to make 'quality' games," explains Anon. "What the first-party publishers are doing might succeed and/or fail, but it would definitely provide a positive influence on the market in general. Perhaps third-party publishers from other industries have the potential to attract new audiences by providing a new type of entertainment. This might not necessarily be a videogame, but something new and innovative that would revolutionise this industry."

"Non-game games are becoming more Popular"



Bizarre, and yet we westerns are starting to lap up *Katamari*.

Land Of The Falling Yen

BACK IN 1987 – right in the middle of the NES golden age – the Japanese games industry was worth ¥300 billion (£1.53 billion). By 1997 – at the peak of the 32-bit era when the PSone, Saturn and N64 were all still viable formats – its total worth had risen to a staggering ¥660.3 billion (£3.37 billion). By comparison, the combined US and European markets in 1995 were valued at just £3.78 billion. As of last year though, the Japanese market was worth just ¥436.1 billion (£2.22 billion), only 31 per cent more than in 1987. This decline in fortunes has been going on for the last five years and is widely attributed to a general downturn in the Japanese economy. There are signs that this year things have begun to turn around, but the imminent arrival of the next generation of consoles makes the figures difficult to read, with software sales up 50.7 per cent but hardware down 11.5 per cent so far in 2005. What is certain is that if the Japanese market was still seeing the same figures today as it did in 1997 there would be nowhere near the panic to embrace the west that there is now.

Ironically one short-term saviour of the Japanese market may be Microsoft itself, which seems to have realised that the only way to get the Japanese to buy the Xbox is to publish games for it that they might actually want to play. Microsoft needs overtly Japanese-styled games, and its sudden interest in courting Japanese publishers and developers is already seeing an investment in those games from what has previously been an untapped source. If the policy works (and there's no guarantee it will), a cynical mind can only wonder at how long Microsoft's interest in funding Japanese games instead of just importing its existing western titles will last.

Teaching The Masses

"Good games with relevant content can succeed in Japan – the usual rules the west uses to make games just needs to be applied in a slightly different way," suggests Woodley. "It's about education and trying to understand what those differences are. This is very difficult to do. Not impossible… just challenging."

Of course, globalisation is not an inherently evil process; its current effect on the videogames industry is so marked simply because the industry has been so closeted up until now. If there had been a more gradual integration over a longer period of time, then these current upheavals would not seem as pronounced. As it is, the videogaming industry is changing rapidly and in some areas threatens to do so beyond all recognition. This creates an obvious opportunity for making games even more mainstream than ever before, which is certainly the appeal for console manufacturers and publishers. However, it also risks streamlining the actual games themselves into utter banality where any risk of originality and experimentation is gone. Arguably, this has already happened to cinema and music; whether videogames can continue to create success out of diversity rather than bland homogenisation remains to be seen…



The Players

WHEN YOU START OUT WRITING RPG SUPPLEMENTS FOR 'PENCIL AND PAPER' GAMES, THERE'S ONLY A SLIM CHANCE YOU'LL BREAK INTO THE GAMES INDUSTRY. A KNOWLEDGE OF COMICS WILL HELP YOU, AS JACK EMMERT TELLS US…

JACK EMMERT

CRYPTIC STUDIOS

Everyone's dabbled in comics at some point. Sure, some have only ever flicked through the *Beano*, but others have an unfathomable collection of boxed *Spawn* figures gathering dust in the attic. Unsurprisingly, it's amazing how a comprehensive knowledge of comic characters helps when creating a superhero-based MMORPG. "Comic books are for all ages and that's the feeling we're trying to capture with *City Of Villains*," begins Jack Emmert, creative director at Cryptic Studios. "If you want to be a real-life bad guy, then there are games out there that do that. I wanted to create villains you can relate to – villains that have a purpose. To create this kind of appeal, I couldn't just go with the same level of violence that you see in some of those games."

Of course, *City Of Villains* isn't the first title to run with the 'it's good to be bad' theme. Titles such as *Evil Genius* and *Destroy All Humans!* have all tested our ability to dish out punishment to the good guys, and it's a trend that's catching on. "People like chaos," Emmert informs us. "They like the opportunity to be relieved of their moral and legal restraints. People can do the reverse of what they usually have to do. People get this freedom from these games and that's why they love to play the bad guy."

It's a great position to be in, making games themed around a topic that you're passionate about – he's certainly a lucky man, but we only realise how lucky when we prompt him to tell us how he managed to secure such a great role. "Way before ever being a designer of videogames, I wrote RPG supplements for various companies… y'know, the pencil and paper games," he tells us. "Through that I made a friendship with someone whose friend lent him several million dollars to start a company. They intended to do a game with superheroes in, and my friend knew he had to get me in on it, as he knows my love for the topic."

It's not everyday a friend of a friend stumps up the cash to create your dream job, and it's now more obvious than ever that Emmert is a big fan of comic books. Really big. Especially the villains. We decide to tell him how good we think Batman's The Riddler is, figuring it would be a fairly good way to trigger conversation. "Er, you do realise that the Riddler is one of the lamest villains of all time, don't you?" he says, immediately putting us in our place. Okay, so who are his favourites? "Namod probably," he says after a short think. "Because of his dual purpose as villain and hero. I've always thought that's cool. Oh, Dr Doom of course, and Darkside. Yeah, he's totally evil, but he was born to be that. So it's okay."

We've only heard of two out of these three – not bad, according to a song we heard once – proving that the man certainly knows what he's talking about. Of course, all the knowledge in the world doesn't change the fact that there could be tough times ahead for PC MMO gaming. The introduction of the next-gen consoles is likely to drag more people than ever into online gaming worlds and they stand to pilfer a fair chunk of the PC online market. "Put it this way," he says, "it takes about five years before console hardware gets old, right. How long does it take to make an MMORPG?" We get the feeling that this is a rhetorical question and decide to let him tell us exactly how long it takes. After all, he's the man making them. "Three years," he continues. "Which means that they'll be hard pressed to get a year or two of gaming in before the hardware runs its course. I doubt there'll be many just because of this. Aside from the *Marvel* one that's been announced for the 360 recently, I can't think of any that are planned."

We're glad that he brought this up – it save us doing it. An MMORPG focusing on a well-known band of superheroes… surely he's got to feel his toes being stepped on a little. "That is so far out," he says dismissively. "They announced it and, to be honest, I haven't really thought about it. Nowadays you can flip a coin as to whether games ever get made. Most never see the light of day."

It's obvious that Emmert is confident, and the success of his first title, *City Of Heroes*, entitles him to this confidence. We look forward to seeing what he delivers this time around.

City Of Villains *was previewed in issue 37 and is out now on PC.*



"PEOPLE LIKE CHAOS, THEY LIKE THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE RELIEVED OF THEIR MORAL AND LEGAL RESTRAINTS"
JACK EMMERT

COMMUNITY

EVERY ISSUE, **games™** VISITS A DIFFERENT DEVELOPER. THIS MONTH WE HEAD TO MOSCOW TO CHILL OUT WITH NIVEL INTERACTIVE

NIVAL INTE

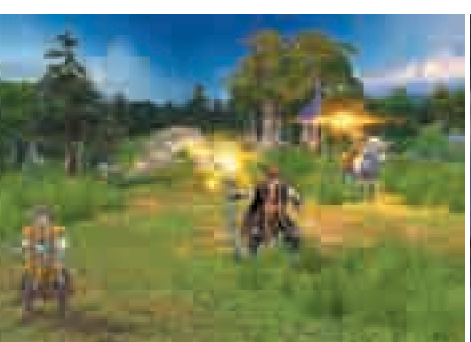


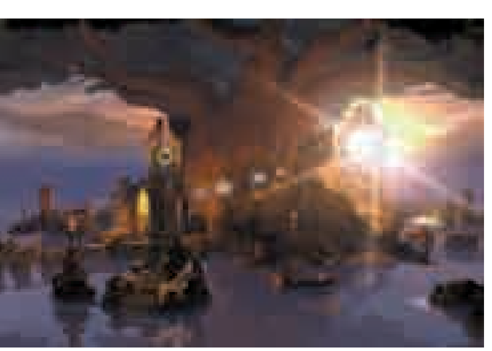
Here in the UK we're obsessed with the weather. As well as being a clichéd topic used to kick-start many unnecessary conversations, and a decent way of commencing an otherwise non-starting games™ Community piece, it also serves as a key area for complaint. This is largely because it's rarely 'right'. This 'right' that people speak of, generally tends to be thought of as warm and balmy with a gentle breeze, perfect hammock conditions and the exact opposite of what we were greeted with when we ventured to Russia's capital during the month of October.

It was cold as we approached the Nival Interactive building. Really cold. Also, it was as if the Nival team weren't quite ready for us. Having only recently moved into larger offices, the copious amount of toys, posters and general tat that we're used to seeing in development studios is absent and we feel as if

IF YOU WANT YOUR STUDIO TO BE A SUCCESS IN A LAND WHERE MANY VIDEOGAMES ARE FROWNED UPON DUE TO THEIR LACK OF EDUCATIONAL CONTENT, YOU'RE GOING TO NEED A LOT OF DRIVE. HOWEVER, DESPITE THE LOW TEMPERATURE, SPIRITS ARE HIGH AT NIVAL INTERACTIVE…

RACTIVE





"WE KIND OF **LOOKED LIKE A WEIRD BUNCH OF GAMES FREAKS** THAT BUNCHED TOGETHER **JUST TO MAKE SOME GAMES"**
ALEXANDER MISHULIN, NIVAL INTERACTIVE

we wandered in a little too early. It was like arriving downstairs on Christmas morning to find your unorganised parents attempting to wrap your presents before you wake – you know the feeling?

Despite this, the building is a veritable hive of activity. The reason? The acquisition of the acclaimed *Heroes Of Might And Magic* franchise and a publishing deal with Ubisoft. This means that we'll soon see the next instalment of the series, *Heroes Of Might And Magic V*, making it's way onto our PCs. It's a big deal and likely to be responsible for the new digs. " In our old office we had a big room that had a bar and stuff," Mike Allenson, business development director at Nival tells us. "There would be a few kegs of beer, and a lot of people would spend the night there as a way of winding down. Actually, this room we're in now is our new party room." We glance up and spy a small mirror ball, there's also some sort of karaoke machine set up in the corner. Nice. "Things change," he chuckles. "Our offices are much nicer now, but our bar's got a bit smaller."

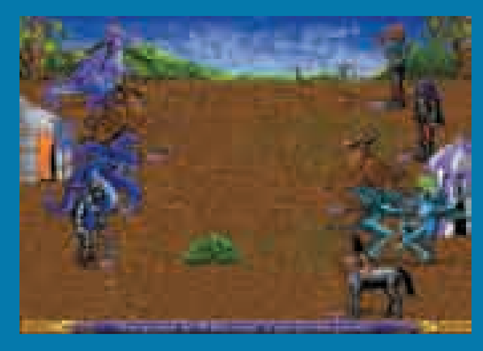
It suddenly occurs to us that Allenson isn't Russian at all. He probably should be. He laughs at us when we ask him where he's from. "People who are not from the UK will notice that I have a perfect English accent," he laughs. "And those who are from the UK will notice that I have a perfect American accent. That's because I'm originally from Chicago. I'm the only American working from Moscow at the moment, but we were acquired by an American company last summer and so we have a US office now as well. This means we've had to make things a little more…" he pauses and thinks for a moment before confirming his last word, "…American." We are unsure as to exactly what he's getting at but we're pretty confident it means that Nival's ▶

A HISTORY OF MAGIC

There's a lot of pressure on the team taking over and expanding a well-known franchise, espeially when that series has enjoyed success every step of the way…

HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC [1995]

When this was released ten years ago, few would have guessed that the series would spawn such a grand following. The simple exploration and turn-based gameplay soon cuaght on, though, and the beast was born.



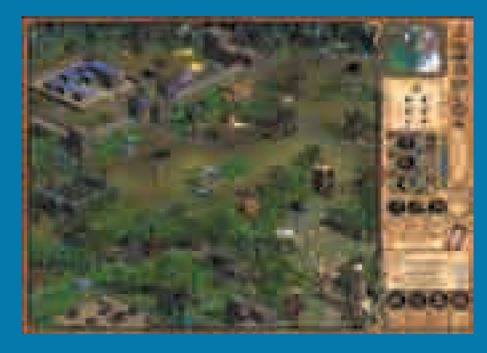
HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC: THE SUCCESSION WARS [1996]

Picking up on both the story and the success of the first game, this is where the multiplayer action that the series is best known for began. The formula was improved in the third instalment, *The Restoration Of Erathia*, which was released in 1999.



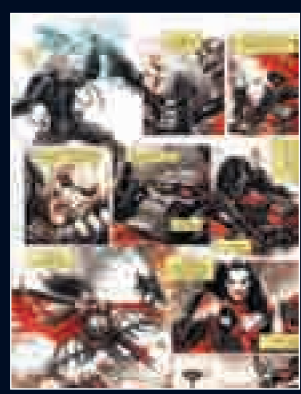
HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC IV [2002]

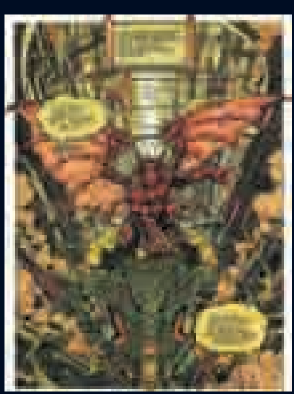
This was the end of the line for 3DO as far as *Might And Magic* went, but this didn't affect the quality of the title; the inclusion of a map editor also boosted the appeal and provided many hours of bonus gaming.

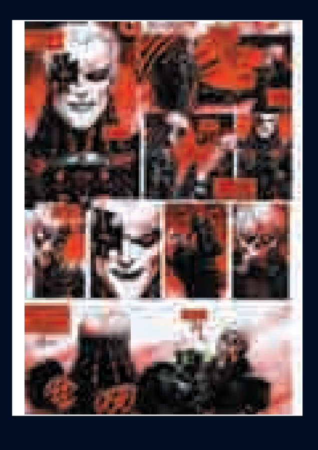


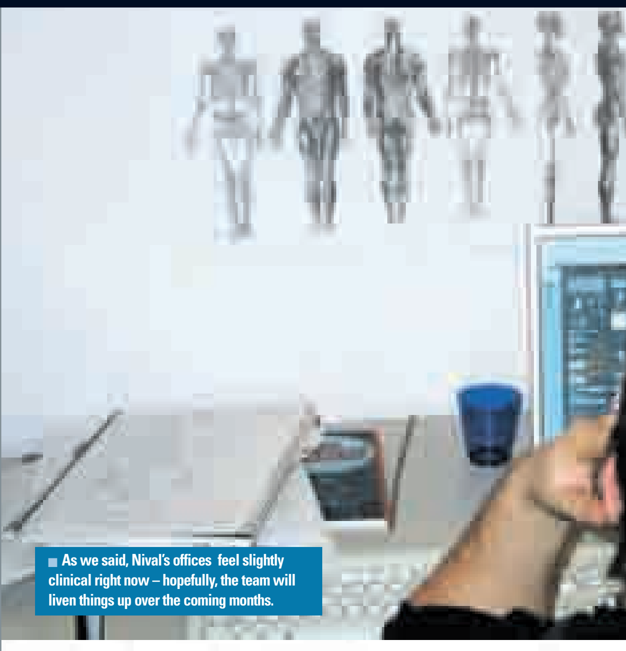
NOVEL CONTENT

As a way of dragging the series into the modern day, Nival has decided to collaborate with talent outside the company to impress fans of the series. If you're going to overhaul the looks of enemies and factions that many PC gamers have grown up with, then you've got to do it properly, and graphic novelist Olivier Ledroit is certainly somebody you can trust with the task. The French illustrator is the man behind *Les Chroniques De La Lune Noire* (The Black Moon Chronicles) series and he certainly looks to be sprucing up the characters that Nival has entrusted to him.









As we said, Nival's offices feel slightly clinical right now – hopefully, the team will liven things up over the coming months.

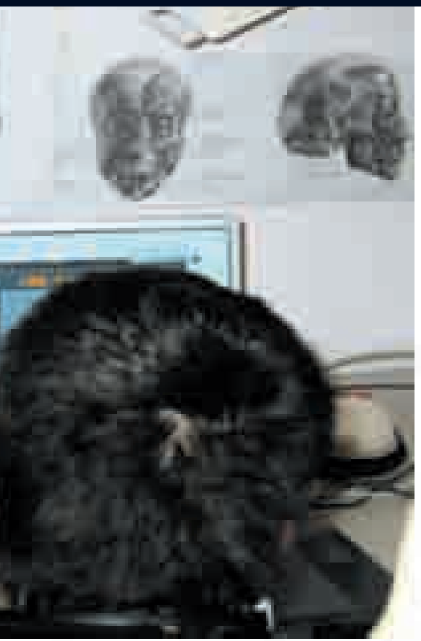


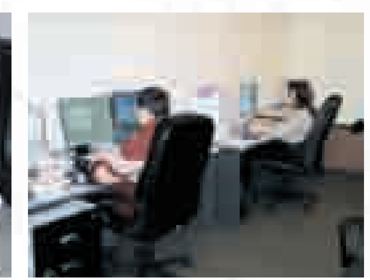


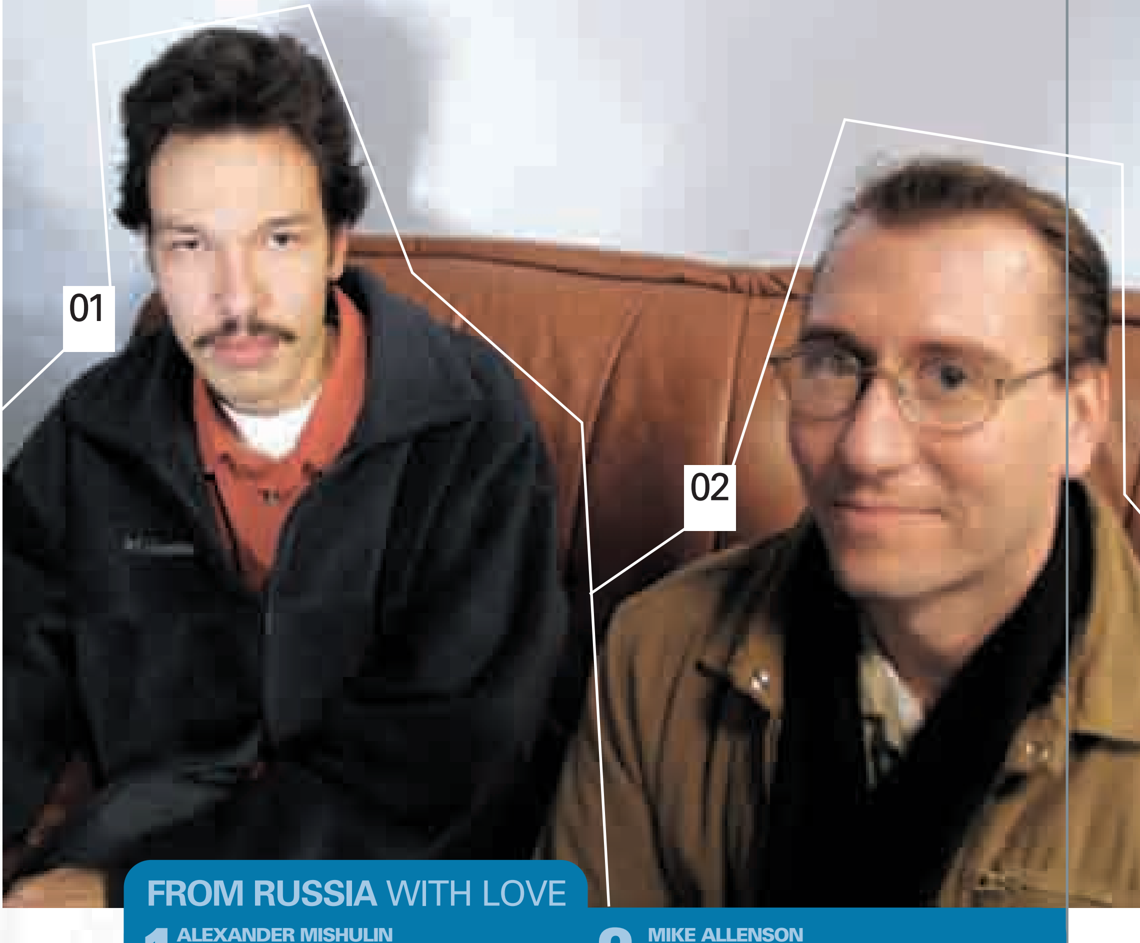
current project is going to be something a little more special than usual.

As it goes, nobody on the team seems to care too greatly about the downsizing of their entertaining space and they seem quite content with the lonely looking mirror ball that we're still aching to mock. In fact, spirits are pretty high; something that's refreshing to observe as, so far, our time here in Russia has shown us that there's a certain lack of interest in all things videogames, and enthusiasm is very difficult to come by. "That's because we have a very small amount of consoles here," Alexander Mishulin, creative director and lead designer, informs us. This is because parents buy a home computer for their children both to work with and to play with; consoles are not for work and so parents don't buy them because that is frowned upon here. They are usually considered a very bad thing. Actually, consoles only started to appear about seven years ago."

This must affect Nival greatly. Attempting to prevail in an area of the world that has a relatively low interest in games must be harsh and it does make you wonder how the place even came into being. "In the beginning it was weird," Mishulin admits. "We kind of looked like a weird bunch of games freaks that bunched together just to make some games – and games were something that really weren't considered as a reputable business. Thankfully it's changed now though, and people have started to see that we're very







FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

1 ALEXANDER MISHULIN

IN A NUTSHELL: As the creative director and lead designer on *Heroes Of Might And Magic V*, Alexander has a lot of weight resting on his shoulders. Fortunately, he has plenty of experience to work with.

2 MIKE ALLENSON

IN A NUTSHELL: After a single trip to Moscow, the business development director at Nival decided to move there permanently. When he first arrived in the country he actually started up a pizza restaurant.

"OUR OFFICES ARE MUCH NICER NOW, BUT OUR BAR'S GOT A BIT SMALLER"

MIKE ALLENSON, NIVAL INTERACTIVE

serious and there are a lot of resources and talented people available here in this country."

This is probably a good job. The *Heroes Of Might And Magic* series is extremely popular and slip-ups are unlikely to be tolerated by the heaving fan base. Fortunately, from what we've seen so far they seem to be doing a good job and the masses are likely to approve. "*Heroes Of Might And Magic* in Russia is like *World Of Warcraft* in Korea," Allenson tells us. "It's more like a national sport than just a game." Anyone who is aware of the insane popularity that particular MMORPG has managed to obtain in Korea, will know that this is a petrifying thing. "Yes, it's amazingly popular in Russia," Mishulin chips in. "We are very proud that we get to do the next game in the series – all of the team are huge fans and we wanted to do it a lot." "We, as I'm sure many other developers did, followed the demise of 3DO closely," Allenson continues. "And when we found out that Ubisoft had picked up the licence we hammered them with a hell of a lot of emails. In fact, I'm pretty sure we broke their server at some point, didn't we?" He fires a glance at the Ubisoft PR standing in the corner of the room – he confirms this with a smirk and a nod. "It certainly took a lot of time and a lot of presentations," he continues. "But Ubisoft finally agreed with us and let us go for it. We certainly think this is going to be the best in the series so far."

Well, it certainly looks promising and with the new talent and fresh ideas that Nival is keen to pump into the title, we could see a far greater side of the *Heroes Of Might And Magic* universe from here on in.

THREE STEPS TO HEAVEN

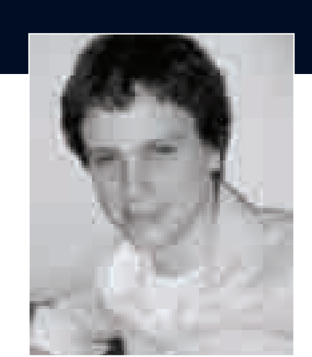
Naturally, Nival has worked hard to ensure that the characters in the new *Heroes Of Might And Magic* are true to the stylings of the series – as such, each one has to undergo serious refinement. From initial sketches to the final design, it's a whole lot of work…





"I'M CONVINCED THE PHRASE, 'IMITATION IS THE SINCEREST FORM OF FLATTERY', WAS INVENTED FOR THE GAMES INDUSTRY"

BEN MATTES

The Players

MOVING ON TO BIGGER AND BETTER THINGS MUST BE TOUGH WHEN YOU'VE BEEN HANDED THE REIGNS OF ONE OF THE MOST LOVED SERIES AROUND TODAY. WE SPOKE TO BEN MATTES TO FIND OUT EXACTLY HOW IT FEELS…

BEN MATTES

UBISOFT MONTREAL

I promise I'm older then I look," Ben Mattes, production studio manager at Ubisoft's Montreal office guarantees us, correctly guessing that we're thinking he looks extremely youthful for someone in such a position – we assume that he probably gets it in a lot of bars. It's a strange start to a conversation, admittedly, but he obviously wants to get it out of the way early on. "I'm 27," he continues. "I started off as a games consultant at Airborne Entertainment, which basically meant I did anything and everything games related for a growing company that wanted to establish a presence in the mobile gaming space. At the time, that meant designing, programming and Q&A-ing WAP games. Soon the technology shifted and my meagre programming skills were no longer sufficient. You know the saying, 'those who can't do, produce,'" he explains.

We're fairly sure that this has only ever been said once – just now. But he's certainly true to his word. Not only that but he's managed to elevate himself to the point where he's working on one of the most respected franchises in the business. Though, for someone that's just told us that he's had the dream of working in the games industry since the age of 12, mobile gaming seems an odd place to start – hardly what many would consider a dream industry job. "Having been what I would call a 'hardcore gamer' most of my life, I was very envious of what Gameloft was doing at the time," he says. "They were making 'gamers' games' for mobiles and were – and still are – the absolute top producer of mobile games in the industry. When the opportunity presented itself to work for Gameloft as a first-party producer, I jumped at the chance."

Mattes' time at Gameloft has come to an end and he can now be found holding tightly onto the reigns of *Prince Of Persia,* one of Ubisoft's most successful series. He's currently putting the finishing touches to the final game in the trilogy, *The Two Thrones*. "The scale and scope of the project is certainly grander," he tells us, "and the nature of a triple-A console title means the work I do now is visible to a larger public." In short, the pressure is very much on for Mattes. It's difficult enough tweaking sequels delicately enough to provide both a fresh experience as well as a level of familiarity, but when you've been handed the final instalment of a grand series, you have to be a little nervous – especially when you're far more used to working on titles for mobile phones. "There were certainly many challenges for me when I made the jump," he admits. "New brand, new technology, larger scope… Luckily, Ubisoft is a company that believes very strongly in support mechanisms, so I never felt alone in the transition."

To be honest, this was never in question. Ubisoft is certainly a company that knows what it's doing, and would certainly ensure Mattes had all he needed to complete the final chapter of the *Prince Of Persia* story to standard, but having a task like this entrusted to you has to be extremely daunting. "Well, on a personal level I feel like I have some big shoes to fill," he tells us. "I'm really walking in the footsteps of giants here and recognise that the backlash will be severe amongst the gaming community if I fail to do the Prince justice. I take comfort, though, in the encouraging signs we're receiving for *The Two Thrones*. Our playtests, previews and internal reviews all point to the fact that the team here has created something truly worthy of its legacy."

This is good to hear, and although we're sad to see the supposed end to the Prince's adventures, we eagerly await the last instalment. So, is this really it? Will there be a next-gen Prince offering? C'mon Mattes, what's next? "I'd probably have to kill you if I told you," he laughs. We look on, unsurprised at this oh-so regular reluctance to give information. "I will say though, that I hope to get the chance to work on a second-generation next-gen title. The 360 launch titles look great, but we all know they're only scratching the surface of what the machine is capable of doing. What I really want is to help scratch that little bit deeper…"

Prince Of Persia: The Two Thrones *is due for release on 9 December and is reviewed on page 94.*

REVIEWS





THE AVERAGE

Scoring's a messy business when it comes to videogames, so we keep things as simple as possible here at games™. Marking out of a possible ten, a game that is decidedly average will score five – that doesn't necessarily mean it's bad, just that it doesn't do anything particularly special against its peers. We also refuse to bow to PR pressure, meaning scores are our genuine opinion: we sing the praises of the great games and give the lesser ones the scorn they deserve. You might not always agree with us, but we're just trying to help – after all, everyone has an opinion, right?

Our favourite Persian Prince (plus alter ego) returns to Babylon in his greatest adventure yet. What a way to round off the trilogy…

Prince Of Persia: The Two Thrones 94



Ah, the magic weakpoint – the bane of all colossi. You've got to wonder why they don't all just wear really large hats or something…



Yes, he really is that big. Avoiding his meteor-like blows is one thing, but climbing up onto him afterwards is a different matter altogether.







ICO

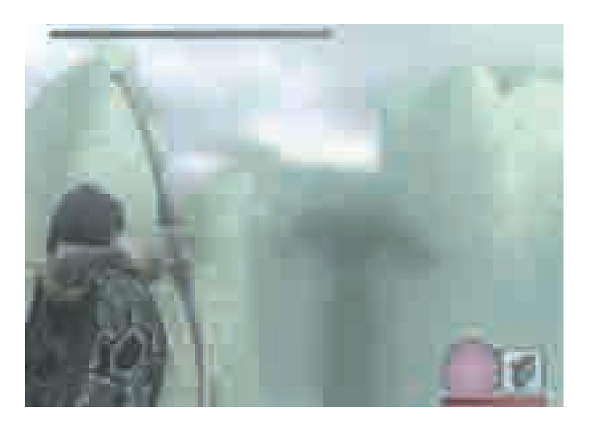


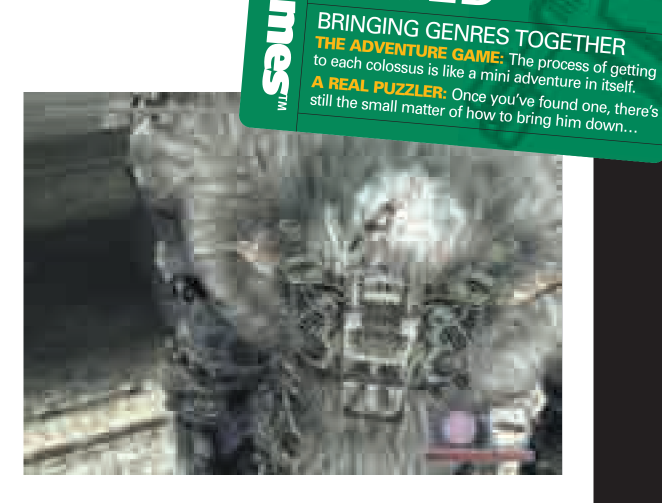
BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER







FUSED

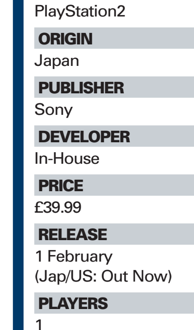
BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

THE ADVENTURE GAME: The process of getting to each colossus is like a mini adventure in itself.

A REAL PUZZLER: Once you've found one, there's still the small matter of how to bring him down…

You have only a limited amount of grip, necessitating quick and nimble climbing.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Sony

DEVELOPER
In-House

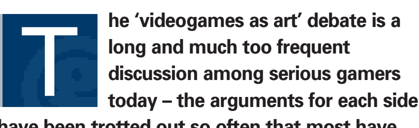
PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
1 February
(Jap/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

A COLOSSAL ACHIEVEMENT



The 'videogames as art' debate is a long and much too frequent discussion among serious gamers today – the arguments for each side have been trotted out so often that most have become rather weary of the entire issue. *Shadow Of The Colossus*, like its spiritual predecessor *Ico*, will inevitably become one of those games held as a shining exemplar by the 'games as art' faction. Its breathtaking scale, subtle and intensely moving storyline and sheer aesthetic splendour make it something that even non-gamers might be inclined to call 'art'. Such an accolade is irrelevant however, because whether you think games are games or games are art there's no denying that *Shadow Of The Colossus* is glorious.

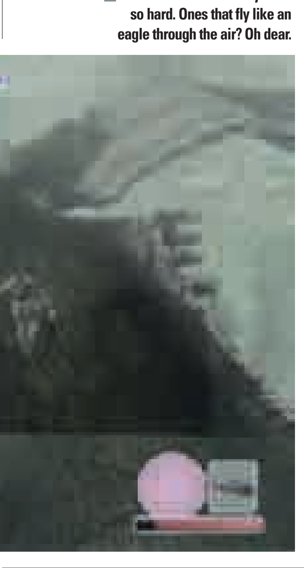
It is a game based on the idea of scale. You'll find no hordes of enemies here, none of your generic foes that usually populate fantasy game landscapes. Aside from the birds and lizards that roam the land, the only beings inhabiting the enormous world of *Shadow Of The Colossus* are you, your horse, and 16 mountainous beasts known as the Colossi. Essentially, the game is a series of boss battles – no distractions, no side quests, no wavering from the hero's final aim. He rides from colossus to colossus, slaying them all in the hope of resurrecting his deceased love.

Despite how it might seem, this singularity of purpose is far from limiting – it reinforces the protagonist's desperation to save his beloved from death, and lends the game a uniquely desolate atmosphere. This, in turn, is supported by the game's visual style. The vast unpopulated landscape and enormous, roaming giants combine to make the human hero and player feel somewhat helpless and insignificant. Although it might appear that the game would become formulaic – go there, slay that beast, and repeat – it never feels that way. *Shadow Of The Colossus* manages to pull off its unusual structure largely due to its beauty. Travelling from the Shrine of Worship to each of the beasts in turn would become tiresome and repetitive in any other game, but here the varied and gorgeous backdrops make the journey a pleasure. The travelling works to allow time for the player's anticipation to build before facing the next gargantuan foe. Somehow, this linear system, which would be considered somewhat artificial in any other game, is woven into the fabric of the experience and becomes entirely natural.

The Colossi themselves are, without the slightest doubt, the most awe-inspiring foes in videogames. From first to last, they never falter in quality, ingenuity and sheer visual impact. It is impossible to convey the inescapable sense of wonder that you feel upon first meeting them; they vary in size and nature, but each is majestic in its own way. The animation and visual detail on even the most enormous of them has to be seen to be believed – never before has anything in a game looked so very alive. Benign giants stare blankly in your direction as you run around ▷

"THE BEASTS NEVER FALTER IN QUALITY, INGENUITY AND VISUAL IMPACT; NEVER BEFORE HAS ANYTHING IN A GAME LOOKED SO VERY ALIVE"

Beasts that move slowly – not so hard. Ones that fly like an eagle through the air? Oh dear.

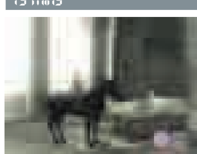




TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

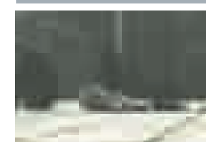
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

15 mins



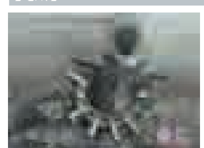
Still reeling from the beauty of the landscape, you will encounter your first colossus – a hulking yet benign beast towering far, far above you. You will remain awestruck.

6 HOURS



By now you've experienced over half of the game's epic battles, but that initial wonderment will certainly still be with you. Each colossus presents as fabulous a battle as the last.

5 DAYS



On completing the final battle and magnificent ending, you can play with the multitude of modes unlocked. And you will need very little encouragement to play through again.

SHOW ME THE WAY

Each colossus inhabits its own vast area in the enormous overworld and it can take anywhere between five and twenty minutes to make your way to a beast from the Shrine of Worship. (You are returned to the Shrine after every bout.) The hero's sword concentrates light toward each beast – the player must find his or her way by holding the sword up to the sunlight and following its focused rays. It's not as simple as just pointing oneself in a direction and going in a straight line however; chasms must be crossed, rivers traversed and obstacles circumvented. Finding the Colossi is never arduous though, and the game's sheer beauty invariably turns the journey from shrine to beast into a breathtakingly beautiful ride.



Hulking structures tower mysteriously over lakes and deserts – the game's architecture is reminiscent of *Ico* in its majesty.

between their toes in an effort to climb up their building-sized legs; angry guardians swat irritably at their arms as you cling on for dear life hundreds of feet off the ground; giant airborne creatures circle inquisitively as you leap from place to place trying to reach them. From tenacious, aggressive bull-like creatures to gigantic, lumbering humanoids, the Colossi are things of incredible beauty, and the battles against them are absolutely epic.

It's perhaps because of the giants' majesty that fighting them is such a strangely tragic affair. In pursuit of his own essentially selfish aim, the hero must destroy these fabulous creatures – and never has defeating something felt less like a victory. When a colossus falls there are no triumphant chords, no resounding orchestral celebrations – just deeply sad choral music as the once mighty creature utters its final cries and tumbles to the ground. Victory provokes not elation, but wistfulness and perhaps even guilt. As you play through the game, and especially towards its resounding and deeply affecting ending, you begin to wonder just who the monster of the story is.

"VICTORY OVER THE COLOSSI PROVOKES NOT ELATION BUT A CERTAIN SENSE OF GUILT. YOU BEGIN TO QUESTION JUST WHO THE REAL MONSTER IS"

Fortunately, it's a story that's told largely through inference and abiguity. It's similar to *Ico* in subtlety, strangeness and emotional impact – indeed, the games share similar themes of helplessness and love. And like *Ico*, *Shadow Of The Colossus* never truly resolves itself, leaving the player with as many questions as answers at the end of the game. The story is poignant and even if you don't truly 'connect' with the game its impact is still considerable. There aren't many people who won't experience a moment of profundity at least once during the time they spend playing this, especially as it's so easy to lose yourself in.

The game's coherence is also astounding. Everything is done in real time, meaning that there's no transition from rendered cut-scene to in-game graphics – everything looks equally gorgeous. There is no 'loading' sign in the corner of the screen, no blank screen between the end of a cut-scene and the beginning of play – nothing to ruin your immersion in the game. There are no graphical inconsistencies, no glitches, no ropey looking textures. Visually, everything about *Colossus* draws you in, and it's difficult to remain detached from something so superbly crafted.

Unfortunately, it's the controls that occasionally ruin *Shadow Of The Colossus'* cohesion. Upon first play they feel somewhat clumsy, and although you get used to them and begin to feel that they fit the game, after a few hours of play there are occasional sticking points which show them up as flawed. *Shadow Of The Colossus'* hero is no trained warrior and so occasional stumbling and faltering could be considered appropriate, but



MY LOVELY HORSE

Your steed, Agro, is far more than just a method of travel. He's your constant companion, your only company in the vast and lonely land in which the Colossi dwell. The horse has a mind of his own; let go of the reins and he will pick his way around obstacles and over bridges without player intervention. The fact that you control the reins rather than the horse is unconventional and it takes time to adapt to the fact that your wilful steed can take care of himself and won't necessarily immediately go in the direction you want him to. It is impossible not to become attached to Agro as you play through the game however, and *Shadow Of The Colossus* would be a lonely and desolate adventure without him.





There are times when you wonder how the PS2 is doing what it is… until the framerate reminds you, of course.



Motion capture has clearly played a massive part in the creation of the game – everything moves with realism.

having to climb up something four or five times in order to make, and then inevitably miss, a rather dodgy backwards jump gets very irritating. Your horse, Agro, also initially suffers from slow movement – although this too is based on realism rather than usual videogame expectations.

Thankfully, such instances occur only four or five times in the entire game and although the camera has a rather unfortunate penchant for choosing the most cinematic angle rather than the most useful one, it too is quite easily kept in check. *Shadow Of The Colossus'* general magnificence far outweighs the rare inconveniences incurred by its camera and control. Oddly enough, the only real question mark over the brilliance of *Colossus* is the fact that it is made for the PlayStation2. You often sense that the hardware cannot quite live up to the vision the development team has tried to realise through it, as indicated by the game's consistently low frame rate. *Colossus* is beautiful, but the draw distance is small and the fogging can reach almost *Turok* levels of marred visibility at times. Despite this, it's incredible what the team has managed to exude from the hardware in terms of visual detail. This is quite easily the best looking game on the PlayStation2 – the hair on the Colossi alone is testament to that fact – and the sheer scale of things still surprises you even after several hours' worth of huge-scale battles.

Shadow Of The Colossus misses perfection by only the narrowest of margins. The wayward camera and occasionally awkward controls do little to lessen its impact. It's achingly beautiful, deeply involving and as breathtaking to watch as it is to play. Indeed, if you're of the belief that games can be art, you're likely to consider *Shadow Of The Colossus* one of the defining experiences in videogames. A truly brilliant title – its exhilarating scale and subtle profundity go untouched by the competition. It deserves every inch of the praise it will inevitably receive.

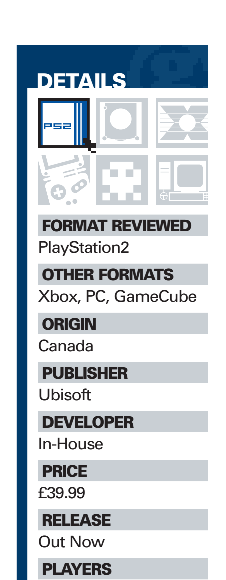
VERDICT 9/10
AN UTTERLY BEAUTIFUL EXPERIENCE

FAQs

Q. HOW MANY COLOSSI?
There are 16 in total; each as awe-inspiring as the last.

Q. DOESN'T IT GET REPETITIVE?
Absolutely not – each colossus is unique and needs to be dealt with in a specific way.

Q. HOW DO YOU KNOW HOW TO KILL THEM?
It's often quite hard to figure out exactly how to fell each colossus, but the answer is always forthcoming in the form of oblique hints.



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, PC, GameCube

ORIGIN
Canada

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

A MAN THAT'S IN TWO MINDS ABOUT EVERYTHING

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES

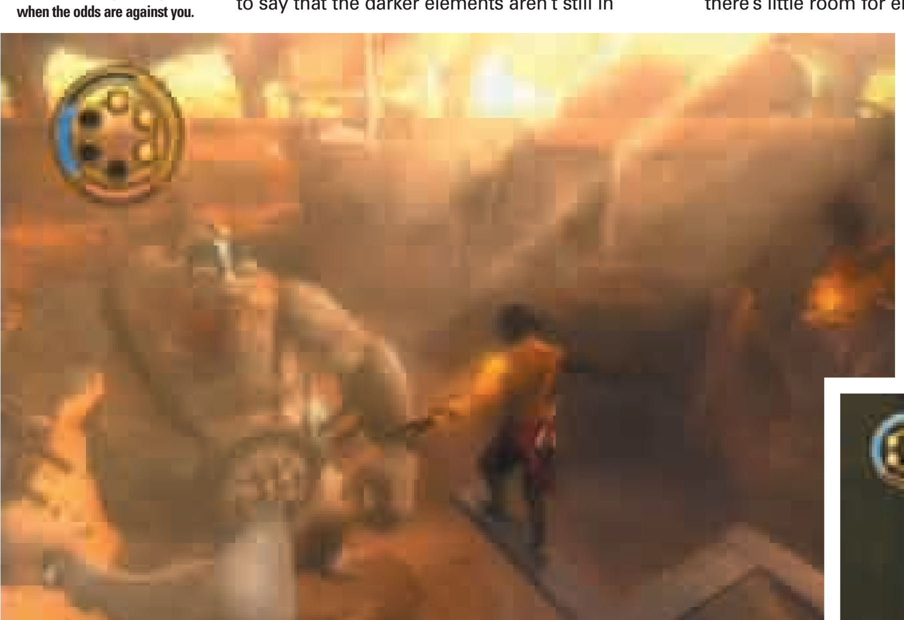
The final instalment of a trilogy is a difficult thing to get right. Providing all the action and popular elements from previous titles while ensuring there's enough innovation to keep the experience fresh, all with the added strain of being charged with the task of completing a story in an acceptable fashion – it's a tough one. Looking at both games and films, we can remember a fair few final chapters that failed to impress, so despite the obvious success of the title's forerunners, we approached *The Two Thrones* with a certain degree of caution, largely because we didn't want to be let down.

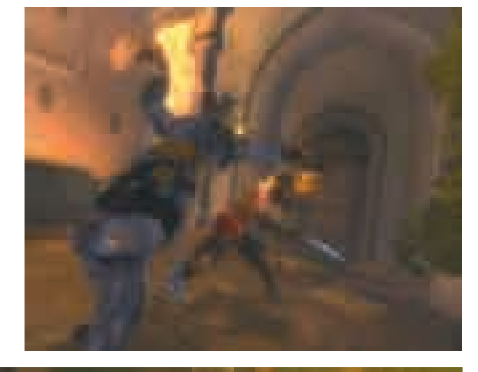
It's safe to say that things have changed. From the off, it's obvious that the dark formula that was attempted in *Warrior Within* is taking a back seat to the feel that was present in *Sands Of Time*. The levels (now based in your home city, Babylon) are bright and there are far more magnificent cathedrals and palaces to negotiate with that impossible agility that the Prince has always been blessed with. This isn't to say that the darker elements aren't still in there; Babylon has been destroyed and taken over by a Sand-infested army, after all. And although the heavy music that accompanied the second outing (thanks, Godsmack) has disappeared altogether, we're treated to much more carnage and also the presence of Dark Prince – but more about him later.

Aside from the extra playable character, the key element *The Two Thrones* has over the previous two titles is to do with the enemies and the combat. Whereas before, you could happily wade into a group of ten foes and expect to come out alive and reasonably kicking using only a few of the more useful combos, now you're likely to get destroyed if you challenge more than one enemy at a time. There are exceptions, but usually the best way to take out a group of enemies is using the new Speed Kill system.

By sneaking up on unaware enemies, you'll be able to trigger a Speed Kill animation that will require you to punch a button each time the Prince's dagger glows. It sounds simple, but there's little room for error – especially on the

Thankfully, the Prince retains his athletic ability – handy when the odds are against you.





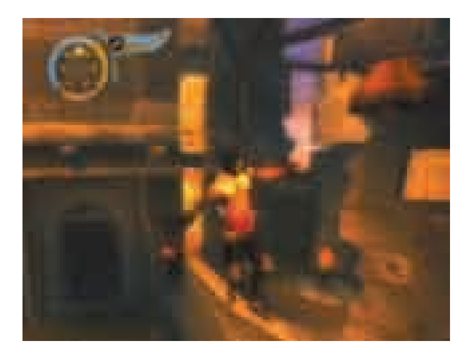
New techniques like the Speed Kill allow you to avoid fighting hordes of enemies.

ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

STEALTH HELP: The all-new Speed Kills force a far more tactical approach to combat.
DARK SIDE: For the first time in the series we're treated to more than one playable character.

CHARIOTS OF FIRE

At two separate points in the game you'll be thrown onto a chariot and forced to race through the streets of Babylon to get to your next location. Well, race is the wrong word really – they are neither particularly fast, nor is there any competitive element to the section. In fact, depending on how well you cope with the chariots' slightly twitchy controls, these sections are either fairly pointless or really irritating. Still, they do serve as a short break from the usual platform action. We just feel that more could have been done with them.



As always, visual prowess is one of the game's biggest strengths.



later creatures and bosses – and you often find yourself using much of your collected Sand to rewind events and try the Speed Kill again.

Of course, the exception to this rule is when you're playing as Dark Prince. Created because of the Prince's partial exposure to Sand, he favours the dagger blade over the knife and so has far more range and strength than the Prince. He still has Speed Kills, but they are used far less and rely on your ability to mash a button rather than precision pressing. This dagger blade also enhances his agility; wall runs can now be lengthened by way of swinging from a conveniently placed chandelier, and blocks can be ripped from walls by grappling onto them and giving them a tug. However, there's no way this much power would be given to you without the introduction of some form of penalty, and so appears one of the more annoying elements of *The Two Thrones*...

Whenever you're forced to play as Dark Prince, you constantly lose life until you reach the point in the level where you change back. It's a somewhat classic penalty, but in a game of this type it's especially punishing. Although you can top up Dark Prince's life by killing enemies or finding Sand in pots, these are strategically placed throughout the levels meaning that you are effectively on a countdown



To be honest, some of the boss battles are kind of weak and require much patience.

and where most routes are not entirely obvious at first, death comes frequently until you know your route well enough. Unfortunate, as this makes a few areas seem like nothing more than a test of your patience and ability to work through a 'trial and error' situation.

All in all though, this is a great way to complete the series. New traps and techniques make for some spectacular exhibitions of skill, and with the game being significantly larger than anything previous, there's enough here to challenge even the most dedicated *Prince Of Persia* fan. Certainly worth a purchase.

VERDICT 8/10
A FITTING END TO A FINE TRILOGY

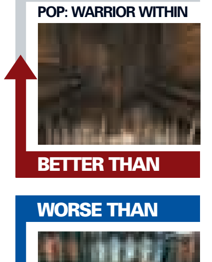
FAQs

Q. WHICH OF THE TWO GETS THE THRONE?
Ah, now that would be telling wouldn't it?

Q. DARK PRINCE LOOKS COOL, IS HE?
A bit, but anyone that loses health constantly should never be considered 'cool'.

Q. IS THIS REALLY THE END, THEN?
Maybe. Probably. Your guess is as good as ours.

POP: WARRIOR WITHIN

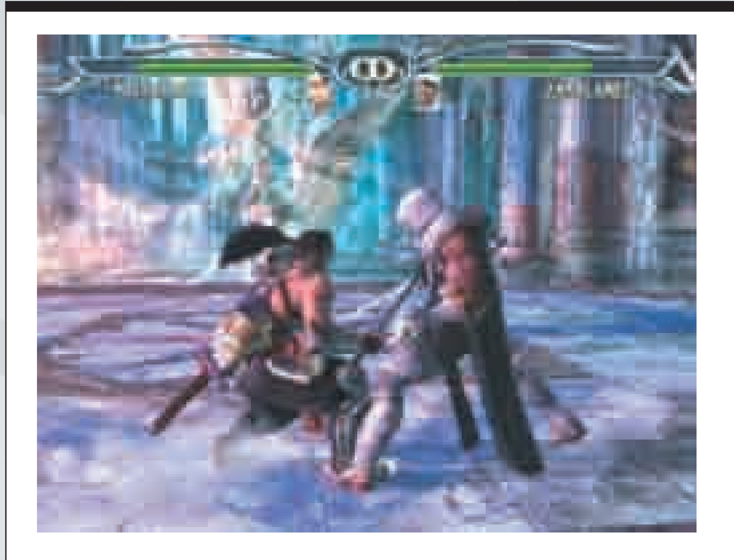


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



POP: THE SANDS OF TIME





DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
SCEE

DEVELOPER
Namco

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

SOUL CALIBUR III

THE SOUL STILL BURNS

Is there something innate in the psyche of the gamer, which keeps us coming back to one-on-one combat games? No other genre matches the dedication, obsession and compulsion that beat-'em-up enthusiasts have for their chosen characters. Whether it's learning ten string combos in *Tekken 5,* super specials in *Street Fighter* or perfecting Mitsurugi's soul charge attack, there's an admirable discipline to mastering one's art. Very little else in gaming allows for versus play that boils down to nothing more than pure skill; the mutual respect that the fighting game community demonstrates can be likened to UFC or even boxing. It may seem alien to some to treat videogames so seriously, but the thrill of winning comes down to more than sequential button pressing. It's a game of cat and mouse or of human chess, and only the mentally strong will survive.

Perhaps the finest example of this 'human chess' is Namco's *Soul Calibur* series. The weapon-based fighter made its debut during the early days of the Dreamcast and, along with its sequel, is held in the highest regard by beat-'em-up aficionados. Famous for its fluent, hyper-kinetic chained combos and beautifully drawn characters, this third iteration is every bit as aesthetically pleasing as its forerunners. As such, series veterans will effortlessly slip back into their characters and the tense, skilful matches that defined numbers one and two will be flowing within minutes. There are a few changes that only the hardcore will notice, of course. For instance, the sidestep has been altered – it's now much harder to pull off – relying more on pre-emption than spontaneity. Also, many of the characters' move sets have changed, presumably to compel seasoned players to re-learn the game.

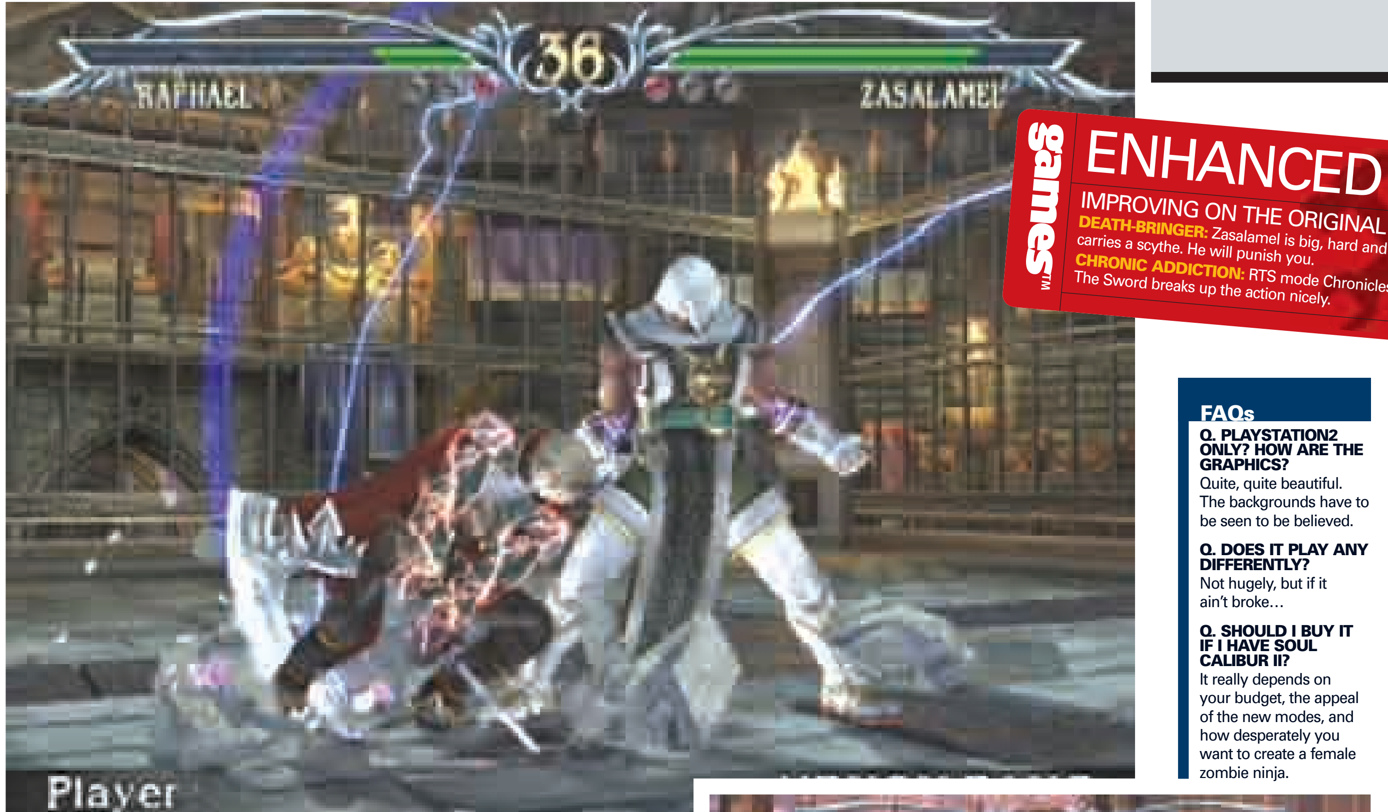
Rather more obvious are the three new combatants that adorn the character select screen from the off. Setsuka, the umbrella-wielding beauty, and Tira with her chakram

■ The uniquely different fighting styles continue – are you a Raphael or a Nightmare?



CREATIONISM

A staple of the wrestling game but fairly uncharted waters for traditional fighters, *Soul Calibur III*'s create-a-character mode comes as the most pleasant of surprises. It's entirely possible to create characters that stand up favourably to the original cast, and through the magic of unlocking there's a wealth of customisation options available. Even better, Chronicles Of The Sword mode actually requires you to build your own leader – an attempt to up the player's emotional investment (we were distraught when a marauding enemy knight defeated Carl the monk.) We look forward to the inevitable collection of freaks that spill onto the net in the coming weeks…



■ New kid on the block, Zasalamel, plays a featuring role in the *Soul Calibur* storyline.

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

DEATH-BRINGER: Zasalamel is big, hard and carries a scythe. He will punish you.

CHRONIC ADDICTION: RTS mode Chronicles Of The Sword breaks up the action nicely.

FAQs

Q. PLAYSTATION2 ONLY? HOW ARE THE GRAPHICS?
Quite, quite beautiful. The backgrounds have to be seen to be believed.

Q. DOES IT PLAY ANY DIFFERENTLY?
Not hugely, but if it ain't broke…

Q. SHOULD I BUY IT IF I HAVE SOUL CALIBUR II?
It really depends on your budget, the appeal of the new modes, and how desperately you want to create a female zombie ninja.

(circular blade) are pleasant additions to an already strong roster, but they are overshadowed by the massive figure of Zasalamel, the scythe-carrying tribesman. He's an impeccably designed character that will surely achieve instant iconic status, an assertion surely backed up by Namco's decision to stage him as a key part of the game's Story mode.

Despite the addition of new blood however, the engine's changes are so minor that many may not even notice. Not differing enough from its predecessor to warrant buying again was a major criticism levelled at *Soul Calibur II*, and the same can undoubtedly be said of this third edition; as beautiful and playable as *Soul Calibur III* is, it just feels like *Soul Calibur*. Very little has changed mechanically and so to combat this, Namco has included a wealth of options to satiate even the most battle weary of souls. A branching Story mode makes unlocking characters less of a chore than normal, and Soul Arena sees the return of the unusual criteria-based missions of previous games. However, the two major additions to the title come in the form of an excellent character creation mode and, bizarrely, a real-time strategy mode entitled Chronicles Of The Sword.

RTS-lite would perhaps be a better description, but there's no denying the charm of Chronicles. Sending little troops out on little missions to take over little enemy strongholds is a clever little way to break up the constant brawling and adds variety and strategy to proceedings. The care and attention Namco has lavished upon these extra modes is a clear declaration of intent. *Soul Calibur III* is more a re-definition of what a fighting game can be rather than a re-working of its core – the fighting itself. When the fighting engine is as stunningly refined as it is in *Soul Calibur*, this philosophy is totally acceptable. It maintains the perfect balance between accessibility and depth, and while the slight changes to battle may bother a select few, even they cannot dispute the game's overall distinction.



■ Tira and Setsuka bring some interesting accessories into play.

A wise man once said, "One should make one's decisions within the space of seven breaths." You'll already know if Namco's additions are enough to drag you away from the joys of *Soul Calibur II*. For many, the new modes alone won't be enough to call for another purchase; as a standalone package however, *Soul Calibur III* offers more than could ever be asked of a fighting game. Make your choice.

VERDICT 8/10

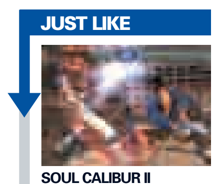
ARGUABLY THE FINEST 3D FIGHTER EVER MADE

TEKKEN 5



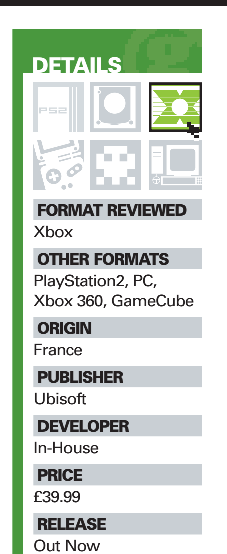
BETTER THAN

JUST LIKE



SOUL CALIBUR II

PETER JACKSON'S KING KONG



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox
OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, PC, Xbox 360, GameCube
ORIGIN
France
PUBLISHER
Ubisoft
DEVELOPER
In-House
PRICE
£39.99
RELEASE
Out Now
PLAYERS
1

GORILLA IN THE MIST

The combination of Peter Jackson and Michel Ancel sounds too good to be true. The hottest property currently working in Hollywood, brainstorming with one of videogaming's most visionary producers has made people stand up and take notice of *King Kong* instead of dismissing it as mediocre licensed fodder.

And licensed fodder this certainly isn't – the production values alone lift *King Kong* above the majority. The game looks stunning, gloriously crafted environments are lit in real time by a bleached sun and crammed with loving Ancel touches: flammable scrubland, catchable bugs… there's a lot of fun to be had with the game's intricate details. The wildlife, including the magnificent Kong himself, is tremendously well realised and wouldn't look out of place in Jackson's movie. The way they interact with each other is wonderful too: shoot a bat, and a nearby dinosaur will stop to feed on it before returning to its business of being big, evil and dangerous.

The spotless HUD is also very enamouring. There are no ammo or health meters, so you have to rely on listening to your character and companions in order to gauge your well-being. This adds immeasurably to the cinematic experience, although it's this experience that's also *King Kong*'s greatest downfall. Essentially, it's incredibly linear; there's literally no scope for experimentation, and the entire game is spent on a rollercoaster of set pieces. Even the Kong sections that provide players with the ability to control the beast itself, boil down to little more than an A-to-B *Prince Of Persia*-style race, occasionally broken up by some heavy handed combat.

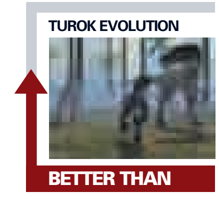
games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
MOVIEWATCH: Captures the feeling of playing through a movie, superbly.
CREATURE FEATURE: Ancel's love affair with nature continues – *Kong's* wildlife is amazing



In the end it comes down to a decision about what you want from your games. As a first-person shooter, *King Kong* is below par; as beautiful as it looks, there's no escaping the fact that combat is as limited as the original Doom games, with enemies that charge you and weapons with which to stop them. However, if all you want to do is play the movie, then you couldn't ask for more. *King Kong* is perhaps a redefinition of the cinematic videogame – entirely based on peaks and troughs of excitement, and devoid of any sense of choice. Just like a movie, but interactive.

King Kong's inescapable linearity leaves it sorely lacking in replay value. There are certainly far richer and more fulfilling videogame experiences out there. But none of those are *King Kong: The Movie*. The decision is yours.

VERDICT 6/10
LOVINGLY CRAFTED, BUT TREMENDOUSLY LIMITED

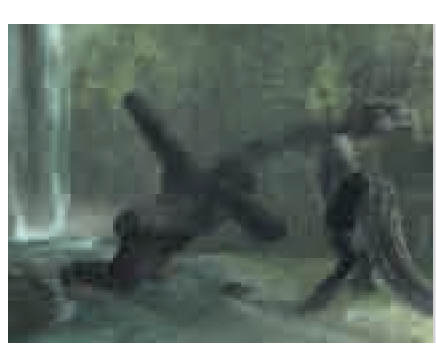
TUROK EVOLUTION

BETTER THAN

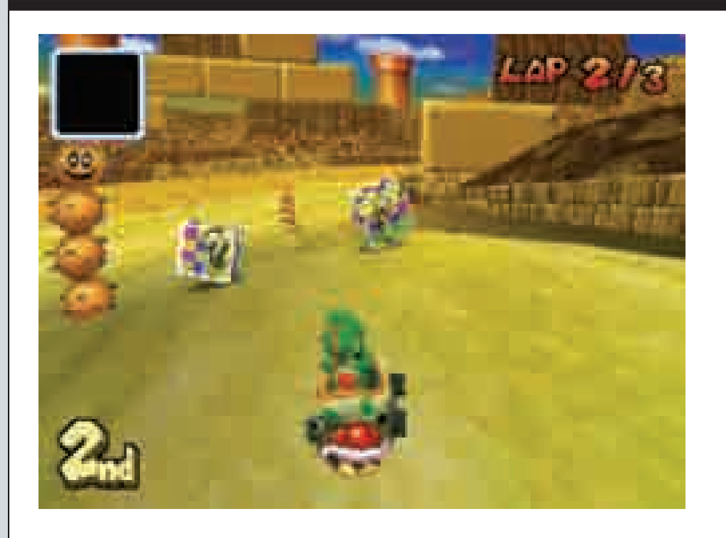
WORSE THAN

BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL


Interacting with the intricate environment in *King Kong* is refreshing.


A linear FPS that lacks replayability, but check out Dino over there…


The film world meets the game world in a meticulously designed title.





Karts now have item rankings – the higher the rank, the more varied your choice of weapons will be.

MARIO KART DS

JUMP, SKID… IT'S ALL IN THE MIND

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1 (2-8 WiFi, 2-4 Online)

Rhythmically pressing the accelerator, listening to the revs of the engine as you wait for Lakitu's signal… naturally, *Mario Kart DS* brings back memories. Good memories, for the most part, although the line between fond recollection and outright déjà vu is blurred at best. But then, what more could Nintendo have done with Mario, in a kart, racing around tracks against his friends other than re-skid old ground? Not much, we suspect.

As such, *Mario Kart DS* is a polishing of the *Mario Kart* concept and little else. This is certainly no bad thing, as Nintendo appears to have learnt lessons from the previous games. The handling feels tighter, for one, and the range of multiple karts for each racer means you'll find one that perfectly suits your racing style. The mission mode – additional to the single-player Grand Prix – brings a challenge element that sees you continually trying to better yourself at a variety of tasks. And then there's the online mode, which undoubtedly expands the game's multiplayer horizons… although it also goes some way to reducing the experience you get from it. For us, multiplayer *Mario Kart* was always about besting your friends and then mocking them openly, with all the insults and friendly banter to match – without that, each victory feels a little flatter, a little less satisfying than it probably should. Only a little, granted, but it's still noticeable.

What's more, it's once you move onto the Retro Cups (four leagues, each offering a mixture of SNES, N64, Game Boy Advance and GameCube tracks) that cracks begin to show, albeit cracks that prove the series has moved on since its inception. Specifically, the faults lie with the SNES and N64 courses. The former have been made wider to accommodate the slide boost technique and now don't work as well; the latter prove that the N64 game was a bland and disappointing mess. Even the GameCube tracks, occasionally trimmed down as they are, don't feel as good as the solidly designed DS-specific ones, which is a real shame.

This isn't to say that *Mario Kart DS* isn't a whole load of fun of course; it's certainly easier than past offerings we can remember, but it's also a genuinely good laugh. All we'd suggest is that it's not the online killer app that Nintendo hoped for – we're already looking to *Animal Crossing: Wild World* to fill that particular hole.

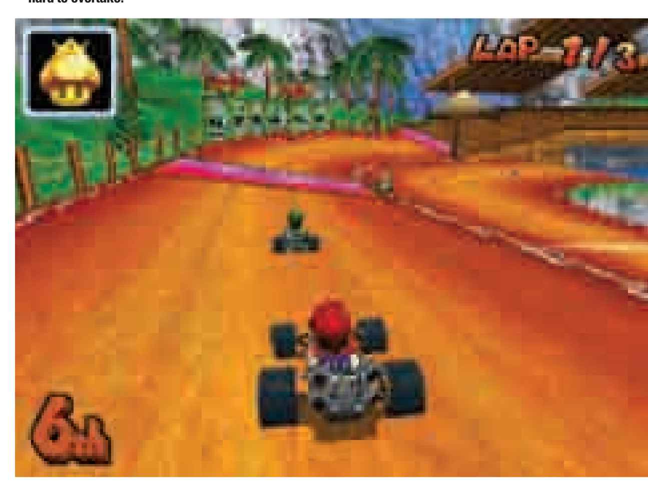
games™ CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

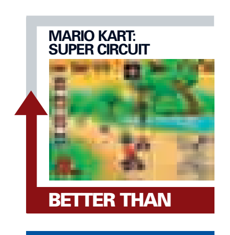
UP-CLOSE AND PERSONAL: Link-up battles with friends can make for some vocal gameplay.

FACELESS ENEMY: Going online expands the contest, yet removes the jovial competitive element.

The DS game maintains the track width of previous titles, which means it's not hard to overtake.



MARIO KART: SUPER CIRCUIT



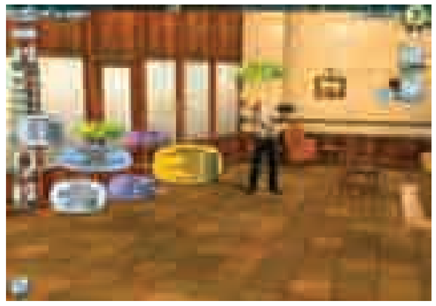
BETTER THAN

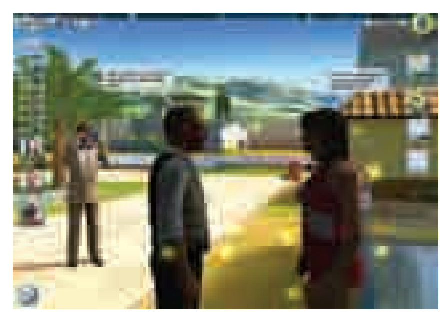
WORSE THAN

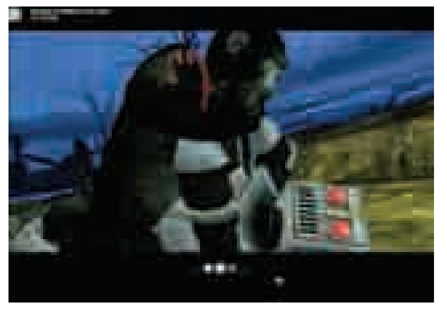


SUPER MARIO KART

VERDICT 7/10
HONEST, SIMPLE FUN WITH A CAPITAL F


Sub-menus help you keep an eye on all the behind-the-scenes stats.


Zoom in close enough to your actors and you'll see everything.


Monkey Vs Robot In The Rain; truly a cinematic masterpiece. Really.

THE MOVIES

"I JUST MET A WONDERFUL NEW MAN. HE'S FICTIONAL, BUT YOU CAN'T HAVE EVERYTHING"

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Activision

DEVELOPER
Lionhead

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

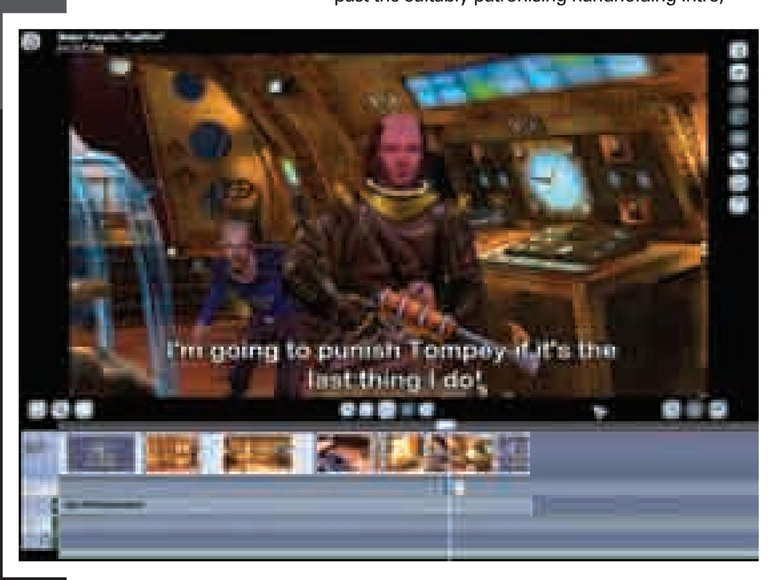
MINIMUM SPEC
Pentium III or Athlon 800MHz processor, 2.4Gb HDD space, 256Mb RAM, 3D hardware accelerator card

Some games are easier to pin scores on than others. A racing game can be judged on its handling and courses, an RPG by its narrative and battle system, and a fighting game by how much better than *Mortal Kombat* it is. But Molyneux, well, he's never bothered with genres, opting instead to release interesting games that shine even though most fail to hit the targets he sets them. However, with one of their most optimistic titles yet, Molyneux and the Lionhead posse not only come very close to their original concept, but also have a game that's as coherent and engrossing as PC games come (making it that much easier to score).

On a base level, *The Movies* is *Theme Park* meets *The Sims* – build a lot, buy in sets, keep it tidy and expand the company, all while making sure your stars keep out of mischief, are happy and don't threaten to walk out too often. Once you get past the suitably patronising handholding intro, there's a lengthy period where you wish the game would again take you by the hand. Things open up at an alarming rate (quicker still if your scientists keep your research at the forefront of technology) and while you'll have only minimal input in your first few flicks – amounting to amusing-for-all-the-wrong-reasons 30-second cinematic abortions – the Post Production Office and Custom Scriptwriting options allow for immeasurable possibilities. Each of the many building blocks – be it an entrance, a fight or a climactic finale – can be tweaked for greater potential, and when your masterpiece is finished, you can cut it in the editing suite as well as adding your own tunes, sound effects, subtitles or even a custom voiceover.

But as Lionhead has been keen to point out, *The Movies* is a management game where players can make their own flicks, not an advanced creation package or editing suite. Picking holes in the limitations of the movie creation tools would be like comparing *Music 3000* to something like *Reason* or *Cubase*, professional utilities worth over ten times as much as their simplified console counterparts. And when the game is able to rate your 'script' out of five (usually awarding middling scores despite days of hard graft) and anything longer than a couple of scenes will take years of game time and substantial financial investment, it becomes clear that making your own lengthy movies is its own reward. Even if the virtual critics don't go a bundle on your latest picture, exporting it and sending it to friends or even uploading it to the game's website can get your name out in the real world community and earn you rewards in-game.

The Movies is an unashamedly complex game. There is an obscene amount to juggle once things get into full flow and unless you make good use of the pause function to keep on top of matters, you can quickly be faced with a declining lot – stars with weight or drink problems and a



FAQs

Q. HOW LONG IS IT?
While you could probably blitz through it in a couple of days, getting your hands dirty extends a single play towards months.

Q. CAN I MAKE MYSELF?
Of course – use the Starmaker tool to create whoever you please and drop them into the game in place of your regular actors.

Q. TRICKY?
Heck yes. All it takes is a few poor pictures or the odd slip-up to send your studio spiralling down the rankings.



■ Creating yourself in the game is as simple as using the in-built Star Maker.

GLOBAL

TAKING GAMING ONLINE

STARS IN THEIR EYES: While competitive play is clearly not a possibility in a game of this type, being able to upload your finished flicks will give *The Movies* an excellent online community.

FROM GOD GAMES TO MOD GAMES

Though the wealth of possible scenarios is healthy enough already, we can see the online community taking things to a whole new level. Even if we don't see extra props, sets, etc, there's no doubt that there'll be loads of tricks and hints that can be learned by downloading the movies of other players with far too much time on their hands. Even other people's created stars could be imported, making casting your group of friends or painstakingly recreated versions of Ving Rhames and Rachel Leigh Cook as easy as downloading… well, other things that people download. It's only a matter of time…

mountain to climb to get your studio recognized after the industry booms. You see, this is a game that sees itself as a simulation of an industry, as opposed to a light-hearted take and while it does have elements of the latter – particularly in the humour and the actual pictures themselves – there can be no denying the commitment required to make anything that could be called progress.

With a timeline starting in the Twenties incorporating key world events that change the public's appreciation of the five genres on offer and various different research packs to work toward, it takes a balance of judgment and the odd calculated risk to work out what types of film will be popular when your next effort hits theatres. But it's not always that easy, especially when your stars start demanding trailers and an entourage while celebrities from other studios defect to your firm, expecting to be treated like gods. Or when key buildings start to fall into disrepair and a lack of builders sets production back a few months while they make like Bob and fix things.

As with the *Civilization* series, one playthrough represents a huge investment of time and attention, but by the time you return to the dawn of moving pictures, your knowledge of how the game works is enough to replace your memories of a languishing studio with a new company that can barely move for stars and awards. Even the few slight problems that exist pale into insignificance within what is easily the finest and most involving product to carry Molyneux's name in years. A stunning achievement.

VERDICT 9/10

ORIGINAL, FASCINATING AND DEEPLY PERSONAL

MICHAEL BAY

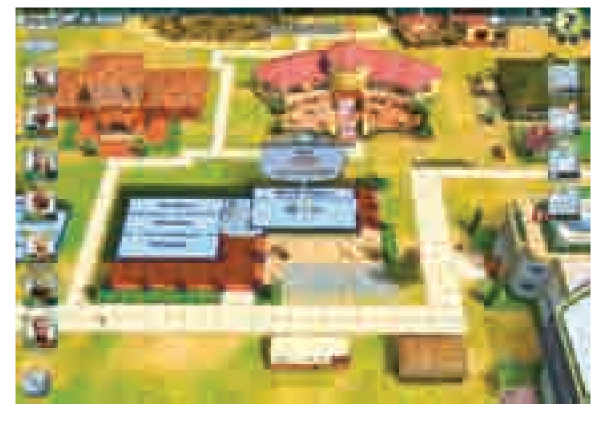


BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



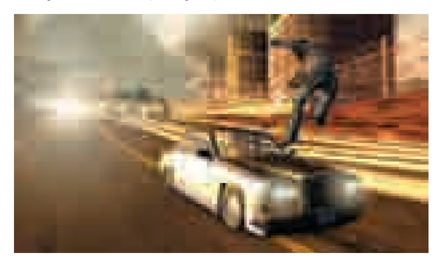
THEME PARK







In order to overpower the marauding mobs it makes sense for you to be primed with a range of speedy vehicles.



It's raining men; or rather, it's raining big mean blokes with firearms who want to steal my ride. Woah."



It's a shooter and a racer all in one, so inevitably there'll be shooting… and racing. Plus there are a range forceful ways to dispose of enemies.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation Portable

ORIGIN
Canada

PUBLISHER
Sony

DEVELOPER
Bigbig

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

PURSUIT FORCE

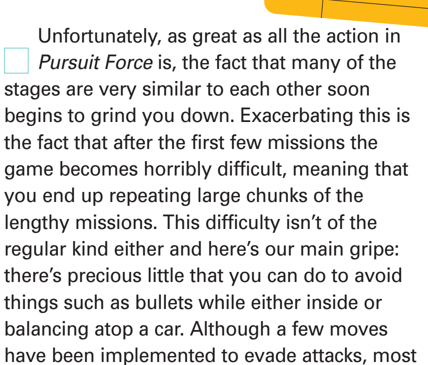
YOU HAVE TO WONDER WHERE THE CATCH IS

Despite the abundance of games that have been based on movies, it's still astonishing how many developers still manage to utterly destroy their lovely licences. You'd think people would learn, wouldn't you? Even those titles that have worked and turned out to be decent games haven't managed to capture that movie feel that you'd perhaps expect if you were a little naive. We were pleasantly surprised, then, upon our first play of *Pursuit Force,* because it does actually play like a movie; 'fast-paced', 'action-packed' and 'hi-octane' are only a few of the clichéd phrases we could mention to accurately describe the title.

Taking the shape of a *Chase HQ*-esque shooter/racer, you play a Pursuit Force member trying to take down the many gangs that inhabit the city. All these gangs favour driving over the regular pedestrian approach to crime, so you come equipped with your own car, bike and boat, as well as the all-important ability to jump from speeding vehicle to vehicle with heroic bounds. It's good stuff.

The fact that you can commandeer any means of transport on the road is what supplies most of the thrills in *Pursuit Force*. A damaged car will explode if you don't escape to another mode of transportation quickly enough, and you have the choice of either gunning down an enemy or pulling up close, leaping onto his vehicle, throwing him out and stealing his ride to carry on with your journey. More good stuff.





Unfortunately, as great as all the action in *Pursuit Force* is, the fact that many of the stages are very similar to each other soon begins to grind you down. Exacerbating this is the fact that after the first few missions the game becomes horribly difficult, meaning that you end up repeating large chunks of the lengthy missions. This difficulty isn't of the regular kind either and here's our main gripe: there's precious little that you can do to avoid things such as bullets while either inside or balancing atop a car. Although a few moves have been implemented to evade attacks, most of the time damage seems unavoidable and you can't help but feel that success is often reliant on luck.

Putting these small niggles to one side, *Pursuit Force* is definitely an enjoyable title that'll fit neatly into your PlayStation Portable collection. Just don't expect to be seeing the end too soon.

VERDICT 7/10
A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH

187 RIDE OR DIE



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



GTA: LIBERTY CITY STORIES

MADE A LITTLE ROOM FOR AN ANT TO HIDE

SUPER PRINCESS PEACH

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
¥5,781

RELEASE
TBA (Japan: Out Now, US: TBA)

PLAYERS
1

Constantly upheld as the bastion of innovation in videogaming, Nintendo enjoys a more devout fanbase than any other. However, recently the milking of the *Mario* IP has troubled all but the most zealous of followers. Many feel that the company's quality control is slipping, others believe that the Japanese giant is becoming cynical due to its dwindling market share. And so, it's with pleasure that we announce that *Super Princess Peach* is a solid step back on the right track.

Anyone who has played a 2D *Mario* game (read: everyone in the world) will feel right at home as soon as *Princess Peach* boots up. It's familiar territory, that's for sure, but when the locations are this pleasant it matters not. Initially, players will be undercooking simple jumps and cursing at the screen, but only because Peach handles slightly different to her fat Italian friend. A few levels in and this dissipates – the mix of flowing leaps and high-concentration detail jumps is as enjoyable as it ever was.

Where *Peach* differs from *Mario*, though, is with its very 'Nintendo' USP. One quick jab at the touch screen will see Peach burst into floods of tears or a furious ball of flame, or even soar skyward with joyous abandon. The developer might have you believe that the game is all about emotion – even the baddies can be seen singing or crying their eyes out. However, that would be a crude explanation of a gameplay mechanic that never really evolves past simple puzzle solving (using Peach's tears to make a beanstalk grow, for example). Regardless, it makes for amusing distractions from all the platform hopping – although the fact it uses the touch screen is almost irrelevant. Thankfully, boss stages do involve some stylus manipulation – *Wario Ware* has pretty much all its bases covered.

Super Princess Peach is a forgiving and entertaining slice of game that's at its most successful when it evokes the same feeling as a two-dimensional *Mario*. It's not going to win any awards for genuine innovation, or distract those desperate for the arrival of the next generation, but if it restores a little faith in the big N, then it's a job well done.



Taking advantage of Peach's emotional condition will aid your puzzle solving – is that wrong?

games™ **FINGERPRINT**
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
EMOTICON: Manipulate Peach's emotional state to solve puzzles.
MINI ADVENTURE: Unlockable mini-games – a DS favourite – are scattered throughout the levels.

VERDICT 7/10
ENTIRELY PLEASANT NINTENDO FARE

WARIO LAND 4



BETTER THAN

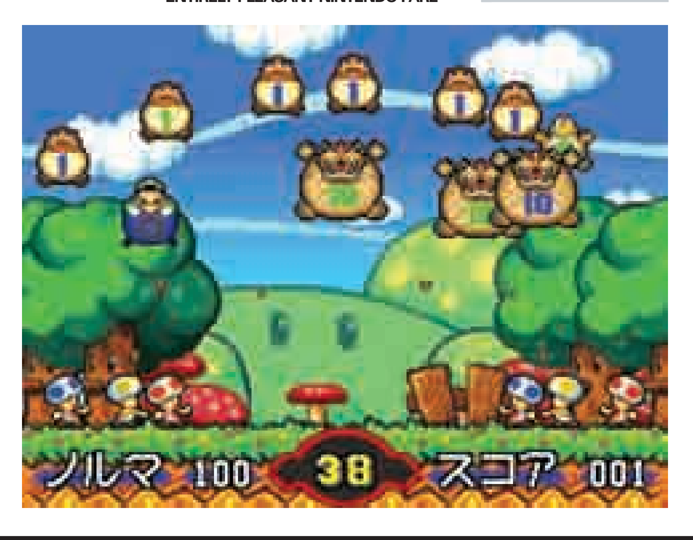
WORSE THAN



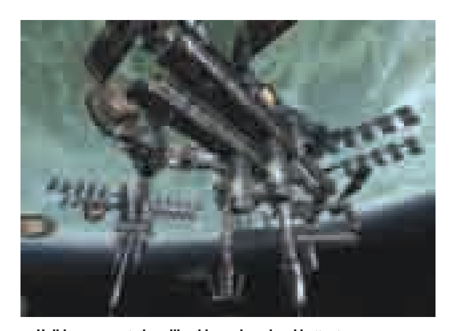
SMA3: YOSHI'S ISLAND

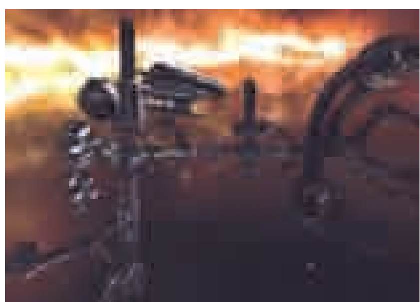
Super Princess Peach should re-awaken old memories of classic 2D *Mario* times.





games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
DYNAMIC ECONOMY: Destroying rival factories is a great way to tip the market in your favour.
INTUITIVE INTERFACE: Mouse or keyboard-controlled menus make this very user-friendly.


Hulking space stations like this are bread and butter to a space pirate – just wait outside and then pinch anything that comes out.


There are many different forms of spacecraft, each attentively designed; there's no denying that the game looks mighty pretty.


Certainly, the game has issues if you just pick it up off the shelf – thankfully though, Egosoft is already working through some of the more glaring problems. Just be sure to grab that patch from their site before you even start playing…

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PC
ORIGIN
Germany
PUBLISHER
Deep Silver
DEVELOPER
EgoSoft
PRICE
£34.99
RELEASE
Out Now
PLAYERS
1
MINIMUM SPEC
1.7GHz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 4Gb HD, 128Mb DX9 GPU

MOVE OVER ELITE – THE X SERIES HAS FINALLY COME OF AGE

X3: REUNION

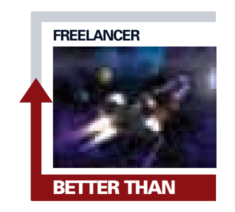
Until now, EgoSoft's *X* universe has proved something of a mixed bag for space-simmers. 2004's *X2* split opinion; some calling it the most open-ended, absorbing space sim since *Braben's Elite*, others dismissing it due to dodgy controls and a poor story. *X3: Reunion*, however, aims to hit a home run by building on *X2's* established qualities, fixing naysayers' niggles while wrapping it all up in a brand new rendering engine that makes full use of the latest DirectX9 shader effects.

And what a looker *X3* is. Huge planets reflect off the cold, intricate metal hulls of ships and space stations, jump gates slip out of the ooze of volumetric nebulae mere metres from your eyes, and less fortunate ships explode in a dance of fiery particle effects after 'interacting' with your laser fire. All boxes neatly ticked in the graphics department. *X3* also delivers an immense sense of freedom. Entrepreneurs can build up a huge empire by shipping goods, constructing factories and taking advantage of the dynamic economy system. Alternatively, you can rid the skies of wrongdoers with a career in the police, or pander to darker instincts and make yours a life of piracy. Or you could focus on following the twisting story and save the world(s) from a catastrophic encounter with an all-new alien threat. It's a 'go anywhere/do anything' policy that's instantly mind-boggling and hugely addictive.

Ship controls have been tightened to make piloting the various sizes of craft (from tiny scouts to colossal military frigates) feel much more real. The onboard computer system, while still ridiculously complicated, can now be navigated via the mouse to make programming journeys, managing freight, reading messages and docking at stations far easier.

Sadly, there are a fair few bugs in the release version. Sound problems abound, ranging from missing gun effects to mangled voice-overs during radio conversations. Frame rates can also chug severely, and flight through even the quietest systems can be a jerky, staccato affair thanks to poorly optimised code. However, many of these gripes have been rectified with a patch launched on the day of UK release, so a trip to the developer's website is essential before getting stuck into what is by far the most engrossing and beautiful space game on the PC or any other platform. It scores eight, but the unpatched release merits only a seven.

VERDICT 8/10
FLAWED YET EXCELLENT NEXT-GEN SPACE SIM

FREELANCER

BETTER THAN

JUST LIKE

X2: THE THREAT


eMag

games™ FUSED

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

ACTION ADVANCED: Gameplay's different, but you won't mistake the deformed troops and vehicle styles.

GUNG-HO: Strategy will help you stay alive, but you'll also recognise the *Army Men*-style gun-heavy action.

EXTRA, EXTRA – KUJU IN GOOD GAME SHOCKER

BATTALION WARS

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
Kuju

PRICE
£39.99

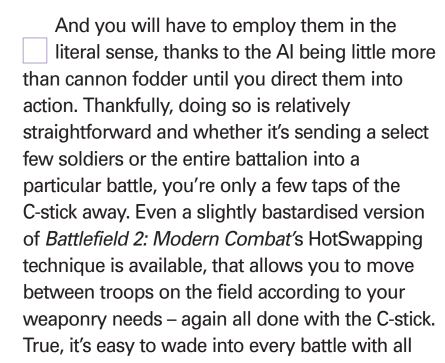
RELEASE
9 December

PLAYERS
1

Damn you, Nintendo – you were 'this close' to feeling the full effects of our rage. Certainly, our initial anger at how *Battalion Wars* was set to bastardise the world of *Advance Wars* (turning it from turn-based strategy into real-time blasting craziness in the process) did go someway to priming us for one huge explosion upon the game's release, but now… well, we've got all this pent-up aggression and nowhere to expel it. Like we said: damn you, Nintendo.

On the plus side though, *Battalion Wars*' vast amount of explosions and general gunplay does at least help ease the pain. Or at least it does once you get into it; slow burning its way through the early stages of hand-holding and 'don't do that, do this' tactics, the game soon becomes the lesson in strategic action that we never thought it would be. It's far from the careful planning and pre-meditated attacks of *Advance Wars*, but there's still much to be said for forward thinking – using the map to see which units are camped where, working out which troops to employ at each point and so on.

And you will have to employ them in the literal sense, thanks to the AI being little more than cannon fodder until you direct them into action. Thankfully, doing so is relatively straightforward and whether it's sending a select few soldiers or the entire battalion into a particular battle, you're only a few taps of the C-stick away. Even a slightly bastardised version of *Battlefield 2: Modern Combat*'s HotSwapping technique is available, that allows you to move between troops on the field according to your weaponry needs – again all done with the C-stick. True, it's easy to wade into every battle with all your men in tow initially, but once they've been cut to ribbons for the umpteenth time, you'll soon learn the value of using the right man for the right job: rockets for vehicles, missiles for air attacks, infantry for general firefights and so on.



ARMY MEN: SARGE'S WAR

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

FREEDOM FIGHTERS



■ Heavy ground troops such as Rockets are essential for removing enemy vehicles, but that just means you have to take care of them when you're not putting them to good use; they're not the sharpest knives in the drawer.

Of course, seeing your super-deformed avatars stomp across the landscape in a comical fashion does emote a feeling that this is still *Advance Wars*, but thankfully Kuju has done enough of a magic act to create a solid and unique title that doesn't defecate over the handheld franchise in the process. We'd say we're greatly surprised… but we're far too pleased to worry about that.



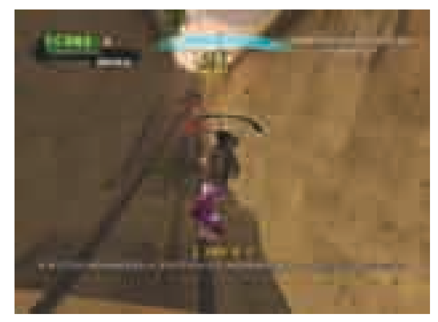
VERDICT 7/10

ACTION-PACKED, BUT WITH THOUGHT BEHIND IT

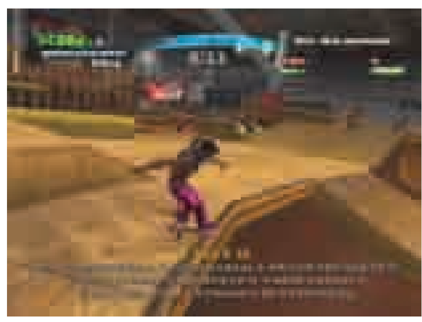
■ Air units allow you to get above the action, but leave you vulnerable to attack.







No boring load screens – no, instead, the areas of Los Angeles are connected by some really uninteresting passageways.



You'll find the BMX sections totally unnecessary and, where possible in the Story mode, will stick to your board.



Fundamentally the best *Tony Hawk's* title going. With Live, you can even challenge skaters worldwide across some superbly designed levels.

games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

TRICKED OUT: New tricks like Bert Slide and Natas Spin variants make for greater combo potential…

LEG IT: …as do the on-foot moves like wall runs, beatdowns and somersaults.

NEVERSOFT PULLS OFF A SWITCH 180 BEND THE TRUTH

TONY HAWK'S AMERICAN WASTELAND

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox 360, GameCube, PlayStation2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Activision

DEVELOPER
Neversoft

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2 (2-6 Online)

Nobody likes being lied to. Imagine the excitement among office Hawk fans when news first broke that American Wasteland would be a loading-free city to tear up. *San Andreas* on a skateboard, if you will. Sweet euphoria. So imagine the dismay when just minutes of play render this statement not strictly true – rather than letting the player live the free-roaming dream, LA has been broken down into nine areas, connected by bland corridors. Granted, combos can be continued along these routes but it's far from practical and not exactly freedom as we'd like, nor as we'd been led to expect. But unfortunately for the retired legend, the problems don't stop there.

Riding a BMX may sound like a great addition, but in attempting to distance this from the *Hoffman* games, Neversoft has bailed big time. Loose handling and a lack of tricks mean that you'll only hop on a saddle when it's absolutely necessary. Fairly broken existing elements like clambering around erratically serve a purpose, but its not these sections themselves that frustrate – it's the Story mode's reliance on them. Rather than reward skating skills, most tasks involve hitting, collecting, spraying or racing and even when your true skills are put to the test, the inappropriately titled Sick difficulty won't really challenge experienced Hawkers.

It's this dumbing down that presents itself as *American Wasteland's* main fault. Usually there are at least a few tasks that prove taxing, but when only a couple of challenges require you to break the million point barrier, only the weakest players will have trouble acing the game in hours. A shame, as the new tricks are useful in piecing together impressive combos and – free of the trappings of forced cut-scenes and menial tasks – this *Hawk* is, in essence, the best ever. Stunningly enjoyable, even. Some crazy lines can be found and hit once you build up your stats, level design is typically strong and with Live support for the first time, you'll even be able to challenge skaters around the world. Which, to be honest, is the only arena (aside from self-improvement) in which *THAW* is able to shine as it could – indeed, should – throughout.



VERDICT 6/10

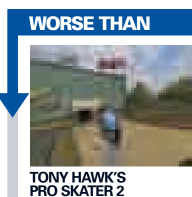
BEST FUNDAMENTALS EVER, BUT POORLY PACKAGED

EVOLUTION SKATEBOARDING



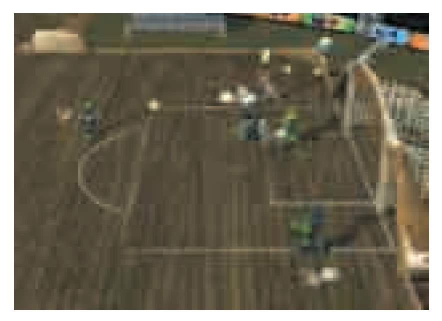
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2

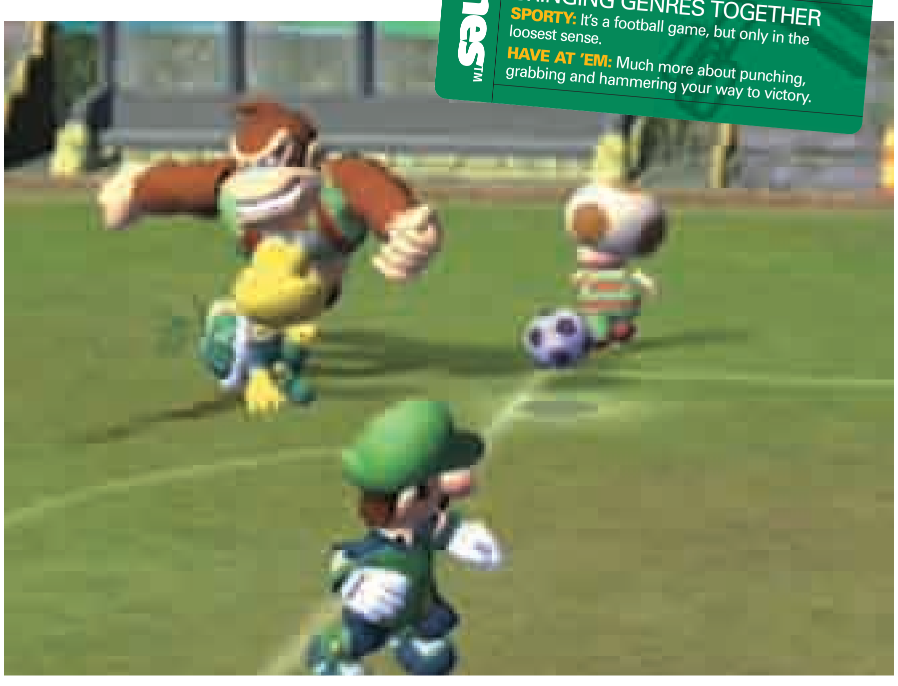
games™ FUSED
BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER
SPORTY: It's a football game, but only in the loosest sense.
HAVE AT 'EM: Much more about punching, grabbing and hammering your way to victory.



The opposition may get all over the pitch, but when playing as Luigi that's to be expected – he never was the most assertive of characters.



It's action-packed and simple, triggering an almighty determination to win. Nothing wrong with a bit of healthy competition, we suppose.



A highly playable game of football – if only for *Mario* and *Sega Soccer Slam* enthusiasts. Still, at least this way, scoring against the Italians is more than just a fantasy scenario…

NOT REALLY MUCH TO DO WITH FOOTBALL AT ALL

MARIO SMASH FOOTBALL

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube
ORIGIN
Canada
PUBLISHER
Nintendo
DEVELOPER
Next Level Games
PRICE
£39.99
RELEASE
Out Now
PLAYERS
1-4

Anyone who ever played *Sega Soccer Slam* will feel right at home with *Mario Smash Football* – hardly surprising, as the development team is largely made up of those who worked on the earlier GameCube title. And like *Sega Soccer Slam*, *Mario Smash Football's* main dichotomy is that it's a football game for people who don't like football. This is both its strength and its weakness; its strength in that its simplicity and disregard for the rules makes it eminently playable; and its weakness in that it can too easily be dismissed as random, unskilled and over-simplified by those used to the authentic football games of this world.

Both sides have very valid points. *Mario Smash Football* is extremely playable. There's a button to pass, a button to shoot and a button to punch an opponent in the face – all other complications are gone. Play is fast-paced, simple and competitive, especially in multiplayer. The slightest lapse in concentration can lead to defeat, and yet despite this simplicity, skill is rewarded. Although hammering the ball at the keeper may eventually yield goals, perfect crosses and good approaches tend to yield far more success than button bashing. At its best, *Mario Smash Football* is fun, highly charged and greatly satisfying, while at its worst it's thoroughly frustrating.

Playing against the computer is far more difficult than ought to be – your players aren't at all good at positioning themselves, meaning that you'll evade opponents and dodge a few big hits only to find that there's nobody there to actually receive a potentially goal-winning cross. The opposition always seems to be in the right place at the right time, whereas your players aren't. They also have very little initiative, rarely attacking opponents without player intervention. The power-ups, too, add an extremely annoying element of randomness to cup matches, although they can help to make multiplayer matches delightfully chaotic – thankfully, they can be turned off in both.

Essentially you're probably going to hate *Mario Smash Football* if you enjoy football games. Conversely, if you were a fan of *Sega Soccer Slam* you'll love it. Anybody in the middle is likely to have a difficult time adjusting to *Mario Smash Football's* chaotic version of the beautiful game. Although it can appear random, there's definite skill involved in playing the game well; many, however, won't see the point in putting in the requisite effort.

VERDICT 6/10
A REAL LOVE/HATER

FIFA STREET



BETTER THAN

JUST LIKE



SEGA SOCCER SLAM


eMag



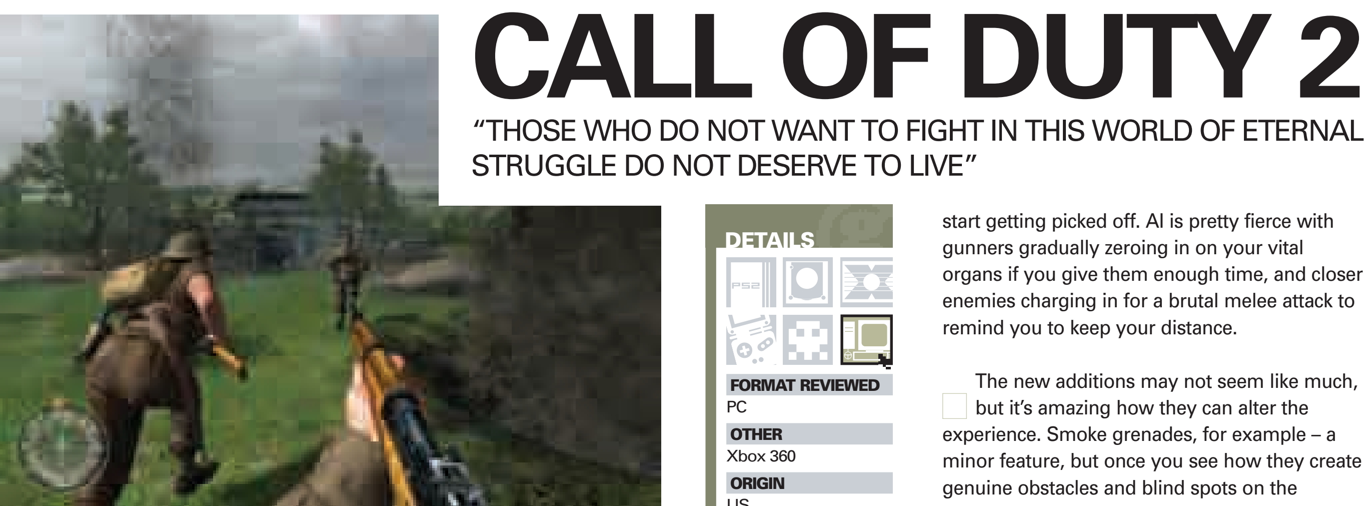
"Excellent work, chaps. Now we just need to get some coffee for Cyril." "I'm not drunk; I'll tell you when I'm drunk."

There are several schools of thought on what should go on in the creation of a sequel. On one hand, there are the 'minor tweak' sequels – a favourite of Electronic Arts – whereby the 'if it ain't broke…' motto is adhered to with aplomb. And on the other hand, there's the full overhaul route – akin to the leap from *Burnout 2* to *Takedown*. There is, however, a third option which combines the two; taking drastic measures in certain key areas while leaving popular elements untouched. Very much a resident of category three, Infinity Ward's shooter probably couldn't have turned out much better.

Laced with topical quotations and archive footage that gives credence to its historically based missions, *Call Of Duty 2* clearly takes pride in its subject matter. Infinity Ward has gone to great lengths to make the player feel like they're in the middle of a war. With a plentiful stream of allies watching your back, the seemingly unending waves of enemy troops aren't quite as intimidating as they are when your comrades start getting picked off. AI is pretty fierce with gunners gradually zeroing in on your vital organs if you give them enough time, and closer enemies charging in for a brutal melee attack to remind you to keep your distance.

CALL OF DUTY 2

"THOSE WHO DO NOT WANT TO FIGHT IN THIS WORLD OF ETERNAL STRUGGLE DO NOT DESERVE TO LIVE"



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

OTHER
Xbox 360

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Activision

DEVELOPER
Infinity Ward

PRICE
£29.99

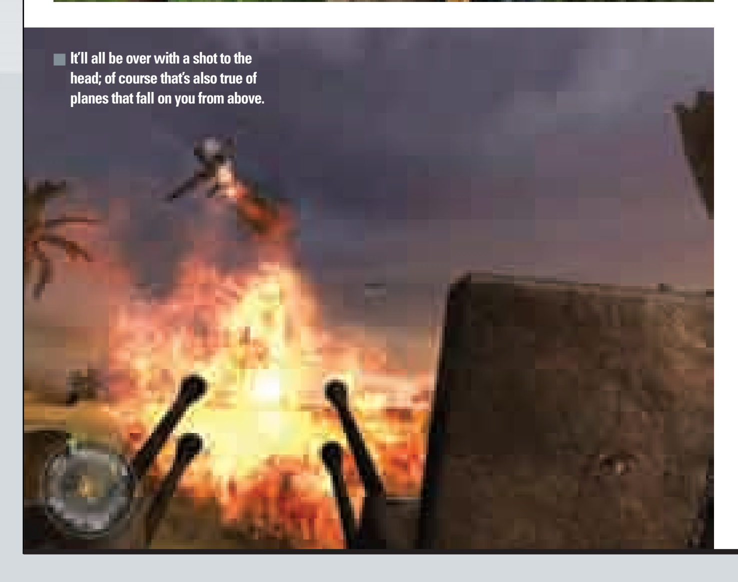
RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1 (2-32 Online)

MINIMUM SPEC
Pentium IV 1.4GHz or AMD Athlon 1.4GHz, 256Mb RAM, 4.0Gb HDD space, 3D accelerator card

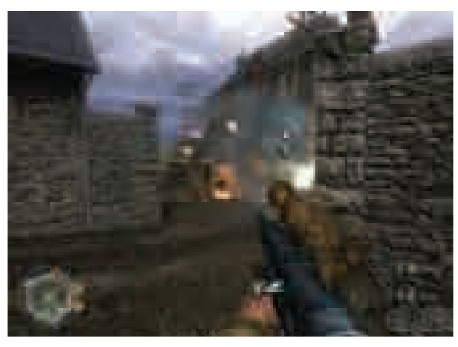
The new additions may not seem like much, but it's amazing how they can alter the experience. Smoke grenades, for example – a minor feature, but once you see how they create genuine obstacles and blind spots on the battlefield, you'll come to rely on them in times of need. Having trouble with a bunker? Lay down a smokescreen and sneak around the back to punish all occupants. Communication between troops is another big improvement, and from the moment the first shot is fired, orders and advice are barked from all around to help you survive. Not just in English, either – with a little knowledge of German, you'll be able to tell what the opposition is up to since they'll be shouting as much as your boys. And even if you haven't got a clue what they're jabbering on about, it still adds to the atmosphere and believability of *Call Of Duty*.

Perhaps the change that will really divide opinion, though, is the new health system or – more accurately – the lack thereof. Rather than deal in percentages that document exactly how 'alive' your soldier is, Infinity Ward has decided



It'll all be over with a shot to the head; of course that's also true of planes that fall on you from above.





Smoke grenades will prove a valuable addition to your arsenal, providing essential cover and an appropriate distraction.

WAR IS HELL

While *Call Of Duty 2* might not be an easy game on the default settings, cranking up the difficulty level is like signing your own virtual death certificate. While enemy AI and damage levels go untouched, improved accuracy and larger critical targets on the player mean that going into any gunfight without some kind of a plan is likely to get you maimed. And when you get into the later stages and the bullet-to-sky ratio starts to climb, even a stray bullet from a distant firefight can be the last thing you see. It's brutal and unfair, but hey… that's war.

to do away with numbers altogether and lay down the rule that if you're shot in the chest or head, the war is over. For you, at least. To stop you from getting absolutely slaughtered, your hit boxes for crucial areas are smaller on lower difficulties, but taking a bullet elsewhere still won't help your cause – get shot in the arm and your accuracy will suffer, while multiple shots can send your vision crazy, causing chances of survival to plummet. Take cover for a few seconds though, and you'll be right as rain. It can feel a bit strange at times, but seen as an alternative to retracing your steps to scour for health packs or the quicksave/load abuse that's rife in PC gaming, it's ingenious, brave and for the most part works really well.

Single-player antics aside, *Call Of Duty 2* is still worth owning for the multiplayer elements alone. Deathmatch is included apparently through necessity and, while entertaining, quickly descends into absolute chaos. Team variants work far better and whether you're killing off enemy forces or capturing flags, maps are wonderfully designed so as to accommodate the mode being played. And with more unique modes such as Search And Destroy (a simplified version of *Counter-Strike*) and Headquarters (battle for a base camp then try to defend it with no respawns), servers should be somewhat busy this Christmas with hordes of wannabe soldiers.

Aside from a few niggles and inconsistencies – everyone except you can throw enemy grenades back, checkpoints can be somewhat sporadic and the health system can grate against an otherwise realistic game –



The single-player campaign is genuinely enjoyable, although the multiplayer also shines.

Infinity Ward's wartime sequel is the strongest take on the subject matter since *Medal Of Honor Frontline* first rocked the PlayStation2. The three campaigns each have their own charm, be it the lack of experience and confidence in the Russian conscripts or the insurmountable odds you face in the American missions; the sense of mortality, atmosphere, tension and sheer scale makes for a truly stunning experience. The developer has taken onboard the criticism and praise it received for its previous wartime title to create its finest work to date. A game that delivers on the promise shown by the original title, *Call Of Duty 2* deserves to be massive.

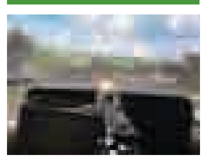
games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

BODY BLOWS: Only a head or chest shot can kill you – expect your arms and legs to get peppered.
SHOUTY SHOUTY: Once it kicks off, no one stays silent; gunfire and instructions ring out everywhere.

VERDICT 8/10
PRETTY MUCH AS GOOD AS WAR GETS

XBOX 360 £39.99



Activision's lead format, the 360 version of *Call Of Duty 2* is one of the only third-party titles to make use of the new machine's multi-core technology, allowing it to easily rival the PC version while being locked at 60fps. A launch highlight and, indeed, a triumph.

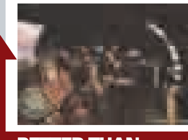
FAQs

Q. HOW MANY MISSIONS?
Three campaigns split into ten missions, most of which have multiple parts to them.

Q. GOOD WEAPONS?
Indeed. From the bullet-spraying SMGs to the deeply satisfying bolt-action rifles, every gun has its place.

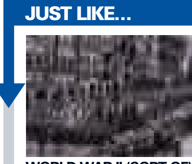
Q. HOW'S THE MULTIPLAYER?
Superb. Classic modes like Capture The Flag sit wonderfully alongside Headquarters and the *Counter-Strike*-inspired Search And Destroy.

CALL OF DUTY



BETTER THAN

JUST LIKE...

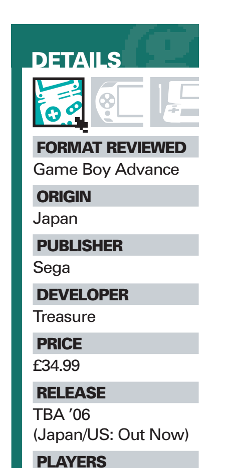


WORLD WAR II (SORT OF)


eMag

"I AM GREEN… SEVEN FORRRCE!"

GUNSTAR SUPER HEROES



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Sega

DEVELOPER
Treasure

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
TBA '06
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

It's very difficult to know where to start with *Gunstar Super Heroes*. Being the huge *Gunstar* fans that we are, we fell upon it with wanton abandon, jamming it almost violently into the nearest GBA and proceeding to sit in the same hunched position for several hours, sporting a wide, slightly maniacal grin. However, while playing through, we were frequently accosted by strong sensations of déjà vu – not just that fond nostalgic feeling always synonymous with playing an old favourite, but a somewhat disconcerting feeling that we were playing a remake rather than a sequel.

It's not that nothing has changed; the game does play significantly differently to the original *Gunstar Heroes*, with shorter stages and a more platform style of play. There's also the notable absence of the weapon-combining aspect so fondly remembered by fans, and the fact that the story changes slightly depending on the difficulty level and whether you play with Red or Blue. There are several new levels and bosses, similar in graphical style and gameplay to the Game Boy Advance version of *Astro Boy*.

So what's the problem? We suppose it's the fact that the new levels seem closely modelled on the old game's template, to such an extent that portions of them are exactly the same. It goes beyond the fond remake of *Gunstar Heroes*' first level which constitutes a portion of *Super Heroes*' second level; there's an almost exact recreation of the on-rails train battle leading to the legendary Seven Force boss, and several other identical sections. Pretty much every boss from the original makes a reappearance and you'll find that you often know what's coming next as you make your way through levels. Even the Dice Palace – something that was fantastically original ten years ago – makes a return. It goes beyond paying homage and instead becomes quite confusing, as it's difficult to figure out exactly what this game is trying to be; as a remake, it fails by not including the weapon combinations and classic multiplayer, which were integral to the first *Gunstar;* while as a sequel, it fails by being too similar to the original.

All that said however, we cannot complain for long. *Gunstar Super Heroes* is excellent fun to play. It's frantic, satisfying, very challenging and full of the sorts of explosive set-pieces, generous destruction and screen-filling sprites that made the original such an enormous success. The spirit of *Gunstar* lives on and it's still one of the best action games ever created.

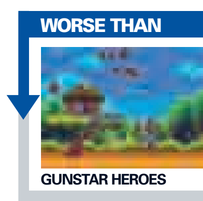
VERDICT 7/10
SCHIZOPHRENIC, BUT FAITHFUL AND ENJOYABLE

ASTRO BOY: OMEGA FACTOR



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



GUNSTAR HEROES



The mighty Seven Force is back with a vengeance… but no more modes than before. Otherwise, he'd wouldn't be Seven Force.

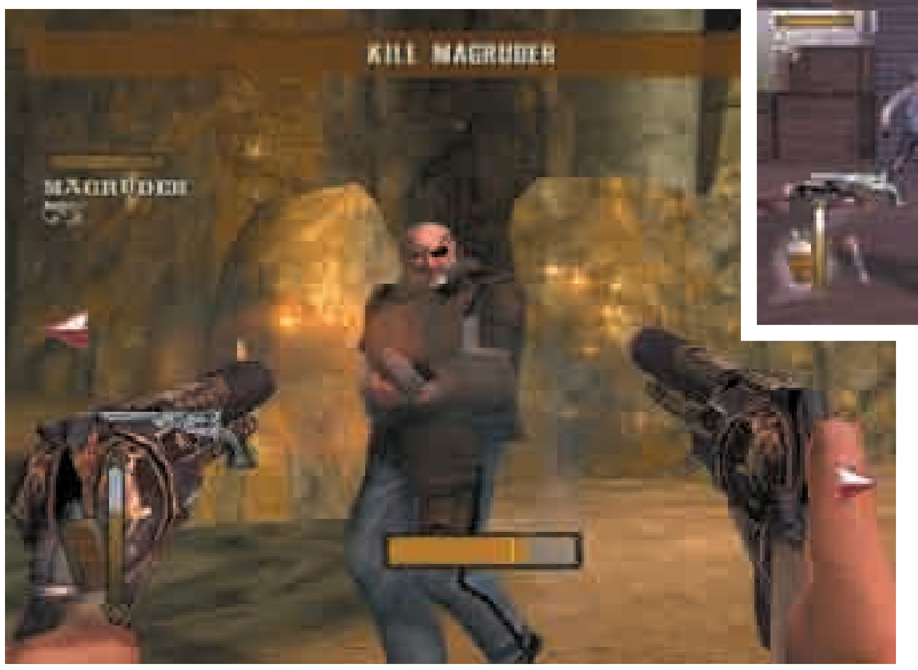


That wonderful weapon-combining element of the game has vanished; a disappointment for *Gunstar* fans.



This edition of *Gunstar* does offer enough of a challenge to keep you playing, and manages to maintain the overall feel of the original.

games™ **ENHANCED**
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
ER…: Well, it doesn't, really, which is equally worthy of mention. Despite *Gunstar Super Heroes*' faithfulness to its predecessor, it doesn't do anything to add to it – in fact, it takes away.




Unsurprisingly, *Gun* is all about the shooting. Luckily the mechanics of the gunplay sections are substantial, especially the Quickdraw feature.


Sadly, the artificial intelligence lacks actual intelligence.


Horses are wiki-wiki-wicked – just don't ride yours to death, eh?

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, PC, Xbox 360, GameCube

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Activision

DEVELOPER
Neversoft

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

GUN

EVERY GUN MAKES ITS OWN TUNE

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
CLASS ACT: Kris Kristofferson, Ron Perlman and Lance Henriksen lead an all-star cast.
MORRICO-WNED: The music is fantastic throughout. Shame the setting doesn't match it.

Creating a believable Wild West setting for a videogame shouldn't be a chore. There are so many cultural reference points; so much imagery that designers can call upon to construct the game space. To build a game around such clichés as swinging saloon doors and tumbleweed may seem unoriginal, but it will strike a chord in players' hearts. This is where *GUN* immediately falls down. In trying to avoid the typical Western conventions and create a grittier, nastier version of the period, Neversoft has created a world seriously lacking in character.

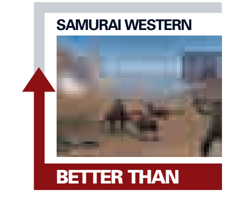
GUN feels like *True Crime: Wild West*. It's a recreation of a particular setting at a specific time, but in trying to build the world in minute structural and geographical detail, Neversoft has missed out on giving it soul. It doesn't help that most of *Gun*'s map consists of flat, open desert plains. It's disappointing because the idea of trekking across American scrubland on a trusty steed is appealing, but when the only reason to do so is to find your next mission, it becomes far more like drudgery than it should.

Like many games of this ilk, *GUN* has a linear story that can be dipped in and out of at any time, as well as a host of side missions (bounty hunting, cow herding, etc) with which to occupy your time. However, 90 per cent of the game involves shooting. Shooting cowboys, shooting Indians, shooting cowboys on horses, shooting cowboys while on a horse yourself… the name *GUN* should have given it away, but it's an ephemeral thrill that quickly becomes tiresome. The gunplay mechanic itself is fairly solid, with a nice bullet time 'quickdraw' feature, multiple hit points on enemy character models, and some amusing ragdoll physics. Unfortunately, sub par artificial intelligence, repetitiveness, and looped soundbytes make the combat functional rather than exciting. Throw in some unimaginative boss fights, and a (yawn) stealth section that doesn't work, and *GUN* becomes gaming by numbers. Again.

It's not awful though; trudging through the eight-hour story mission is pleasant enough, and there's poker to play and horses to rustle, but it's far too generic to be considered anything other than average. Those with a penchant for herding cows might have found the answer to their prayers, but those looking for their next *GTA*-type fix would do well to look elsewhere.

VERDICT 5/10
A DISTINCTLY UNSPECTACULAR COWBOY-'EM-UP

SAMURAI WESTERN



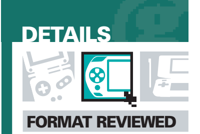
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



RED DEAD REVOLVER

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation Portable

ORIGIN
New Zealand

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DEVELOPER
Sidhe Interactive

PRICE
£19.99

RELEASE
2 December

PLAYERS
1 (2-4 via Wi-Fi)

GRIPSHIFT

BET YOU NEVER KNEW CARS COULD BE THIS VERSATILE…

Flying cars are awesome. A bit like *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* only without all the singing, GripShift is made up of hundreds of courses that will see your car spending more time in the air than on the ground. Simple handling gives some degree of air control for that perfect landing or those mid-air collections, while a selection of different vehicles will mean that changing cars might help you solve a stage that you're struggling with. It'd be handy to have the option to do this at the level select screen rather than having to go all the way back to the Options menu, but its only with small, forgivable oversights like these that the game shows its budget colours. Fundamentally, the play experience is rock solid and that's what really matters after all.

It's the way that this game challenges you to think inside, outside and around the box with its three goals per level that rates among some of *GripShift's* finer features. Time trial, collection and secret-hunting objectives keep the action varied and although you'll only need to finish one of them to unlock the next stage, getting to the next group of levels will often require you to go back and pick up the pieces. Naturally, short cuts abound and if one particular route looks too obvious, then that's probably because is – there is usually some trick to getting a gold medal and this can take some serious lateral thought to determine. Or some good old-fashioned luck. That's always helpful, too.

Aside from the puzzle-style levels, the UMD is awash with extra goodies. A fully fledged Race mode is tucked away in there and is unlocked once you finish your first Race Challenge, but it's with the mini-games that you'll find most enjoyment. A simple bowling game that triumphs through the unholy fusion of cars and penguins; a stunt arena full of collectable stars and trick opportunities; a pool game where bombs are thrown onto the table every few seconds. Even when you've had your fill of bonus games, there's still more for you to be getting on with – the course editor allows you to create and save your own puzzle tracks with the freedom that the developer itself had. You can even chuck your created maps online once you've cleared them yourself, a fair precautionary measure to stop the net filling with ridiculous and impossible levels.

A wonderful fusion of genres that is perfectly suited to the PlayStation Portable, *GripShift* is fitting testament to Sidhe's developmental abilities and looks to be leading the pack in terms of budget portable gaming.

VERDICT 7/10
GREAT FUN AND EVEN BETTER VALUE FOR MONEY

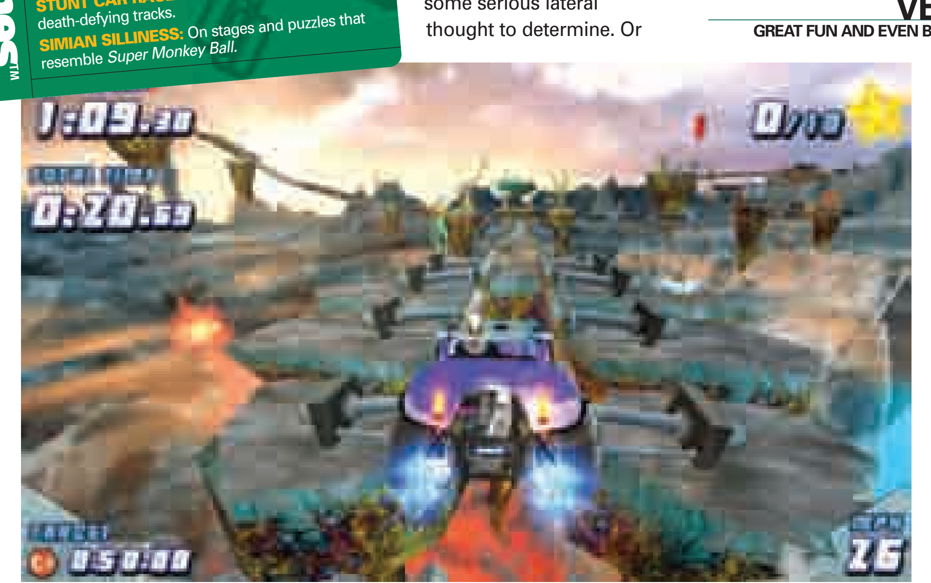
games™
FUSED
BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER
STUNT CAR RACER: Tear around undulating and death-defying tracks.
SIMIAN SILLINESS: On stages and puzzles that resemble *Super Monkey Ball*.

FRANTIX

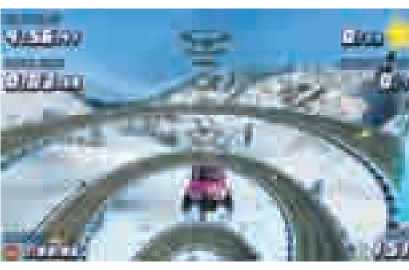
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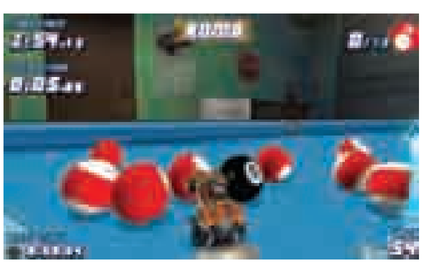
WORSE THAN

SUPER MONKEY BALL DELUXE



You'll never be stuck for something new to do, as *GripShift* consists of many stages, levels, bonus rounds and even a course editor element that allows you to create and save your own puzzle tracks. It's a lot of mini adventures in one lovely package.


Once you've designed and completed your own track, you can deposit it online for others to sample.







JAMES BOND 007: FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

NO, MR BOND, I EXPECT YOU TO TRY…

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, PlayStation Portable, GameCube

ORIGIN
Canada

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER
EA Canada

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4

Discovery is a very important part of videogaming. Opening a new level, finding the way into the next section of a dungeon, seeing a new enemy for the first time – all extremely familiar to anyone who plays games. We play on to find out what's going to happen, not only in terms of story, but also in terms of content. You don't watch a movie to find out what location they're going to next. It's one of the things that makes gaming unique.

Sadly, with *From Russia With Love*, EA seems to have forgotten this most crucial of gameplay devices. Instead of letting you discover the game's thrilling moments for yourself, it leads you by the hand – to the point where it wouldn't matter if you were asleep. Each point of interest is highlighted with an unholy gleam, and playing the game involves little more than simply guiding the lovingly recreated Sean Connery (complete with old man voice) from one gleam to the next.

A shame, because individually the elements are solid enough. It looks lovely, with detailed characters and environments, all finished off with that familiar EA sheen. Combat is as generic as is physically possible, but works fine. There's even a degree of satisfaction to be had when clearing a room of soldiers, with intelligent use of cover. But satisfaction immediately dissipates when the realisation sets in that you know what's coming next; and it's from here that *From Russia With Love* becomes a quite depressing experience.

It's all so uninspired. There are stealth sections, driving sections, on-rails shooting sections… but they're all fundamentally dull. The game's more linear than Vib Ribbon, so each level becomes a stroll from one point to another with some shooting thrown in for good measure. There's absolutely no scope for experimentation or discovery; you're simply shepherded from set piece to set piece while the story chugs on alongside.

Despite all of this, the simple fact is that there's a definite market for 007. EA knows what it's doing, it knows the demographic it caters for, and undoubtedly the game will sell by the truckload. It's harmless mass-market entertainment; the kind that any discerning gamer should already know to leave well alone.



Not so much martial arts as a swift slap to the face – that's Bond.

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

EXTRA PADDING: A comprehensive but insipid multiplayer mode rounds off this dull package.

YESH MISH: Connery sounds less like himself than Q's sound-alike sounds like Desmond Llewellyn.

007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING

JUST LIKE

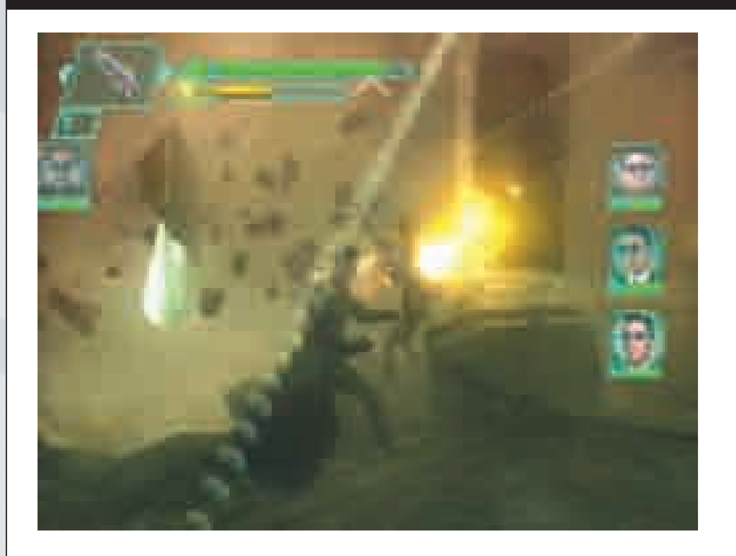
WORSE THAN

GOLDENEYE

VERDICT 4/10

CRUSHINGLY DULL, SAVED BY GENERAL COMPETENCE


eMag







FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Atari

DEVELOPER
Shiny Interactive

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

THE MATRIX: PATH OF NEO

"WHY DO MY EYES HURT? YOU'VE NEVER USED THEM BEFORE"

To an extent, all the best combat action games allow you to play as 'the one'. Characters like Dante and Kratos have powers far superior to their adversaries. The games give players the same feeling of immense strength and superiority, and this is where Shiny dropped the ball with *Enter The Matrix*. Why would anyone want to play as the also rans when there's such scope for being the real deal? *Path Of Neo* rights many of these wrongs.

The game chronicles Neo's progress throughout the *Matrix* story. Starting with him asleep at his computer in the first film, the player is endowed little more than the power to shove guards in the chest, and to run. Fast forward to the game's final levels, and you're practically a god. The question is: how successfully has Shiny crafted this journey? Well, first impressions are worrying. The game opens with a dream sequence – a hazy recreation of the infamous lobby scene, where Neo fights a constant stream of increasingly difficult enemies. It's a device used to gauge the rest of the game's difficulty, but as an introductory sequence it's quite overwhelming. The camera seems to bypass the last four years of progress, spending its time losing focus and getting stuck behind obstacles. The targeting system seems fundamentally broken, constantly picking out distant enemies while you are assaulted from a foot away. Hand to hand combat in this opening scene is laughable – Neo and his foe don't line up, meaning all the blows miss and the two are left completing animation routines while facing away from each other.

A huge mix of beautifully crafted but lacklustre training levels later, and combat feels more



FOLLOW THE WHITE RABBIT

Path Of Neo **has a lot more in common with** ***Metal Gear Solid*** **than just its slyly referential Snake-style training mission; the game is brimming with self-reflexivity, referentialism and post-modern ideas. In keeping with the** ***Matrix*** **mythology, the game toys with ideas of reality, the barriers between gamer and game, and even takes the time to poke fun at itself. The opening levels are a direct homage to some of the Wachowski's favourite movies –** ***Hard Boiled*** **and** ***Kill Bill*** **are lovingly pastiched, and the final scenes reach** ***MGS2*** **levels of post-modern insanity. We are not at liberty to explain how, or indeed why, but we're sure you'll be pleasantly surprised.**



Strangely, we don't recall this scene from the movie. Maybe it was on when we were asleep.

FAQs

Q. SO CAN I STOP BULLETS?
Yes. You can do EVERYTHING that Neo can do.

Q. EVERYTHING?
Yes. You can even see in code. It looks cool.

Q. DOES IT HAVE REAL VOICES?
Keanu sounds typically stoned, Hugo Weaving sounds awesome – they're all there.

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

LEVEL UP: The ring-based move-purchasing system allows for a unique Neo for each player.

NORMAL PEOPLE: The first PS2 game to include normal mapping. When Neo tries, it looks fantastic.

The turning point of the game is the fight against 'The Smiths' – though sadly, there's no sign of Morrissey anywhere.

fluid as you get to grips with targeting. The camera is still a nightmare, and you've now discovered that Neo runs like a goon. But then, it all just 'clicks'. You start to believe. The combat reveals its amazing depth. The camera and the controls become less bemusing. You start to become 'The One'.

When the realisation sets in that *Path Of Neo* isn't a button basher, it begins to show its strength. Combat is reminiscent of *Devil May Cry* and *God Of War*, allowing for devastating and visually enthralling combos that make you feel like the most powerful entity on the planet – surely the whole point of a *Matrix* game. While the fighting doesn't reach the dizzy heights of Dante and co – it never feels as solid or free flowing – the animation and sheer number of moves possible make it a joy to use. Mixing up hand-to-hand, melee attacks and gunplay, often all in the same combo, it's possible to rid a room of enemies in one fluid move, but it takes the skill and dexterity expected of the genre.

Unfortunately, the first half of the game's story is riddled with inconsistencies. Hopping between key moments from the movies and scenes that have been added to flesh it out, the quality of the levels vary wildly, causing frustration as the game struggles to find its stride. One moment it'll feel like the finest combat game of 2005; the next a sub standard third-person movie licence. However, when the key scene from the second movie kicks in – the park fight against hundreds of Agent Smiths – *Path Of Neo* picks up immeasurably. This section is one of the most gratifying in the genre's history. One man, one metal pole, and hundreds of enemies – it needs to be seen to be believed. From that moment on, the game jumps from set piece to set piece, each offering a level of invention no one could have expected from the sequel to *Enter The Matrix*. The final act even changes the ending of the trilogy, and is as glorious a denouement as the IP deserves.

Path Of Neo has turned out to be a pleasant surprise. There's no denying its flaws – it can feel rushed, glitchy and rough around the edges, but when it does flow, it's a magnificent spectacle. Shiny has created a rich universe for fans to lose themselves in, and those willing to overlook a few niggly mechanical issues will revel in the chance to finally be the true 'One'.

We can't tell you about the ending, but suffice to say… well, it's a little bit crazy.

ENTER THE MATRIX



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

DEVIL MAY CRY 3

VERDICT 7/10

A FLAWED MASTERPIECE, BUT UNDENIABLY ENJOYABLE

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation Portable

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Rockstar Games

DEVELOPER
Rockstar Leeds

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1 (2-6 via Wi-Fi)

HERE WE GO AGAIN…

GTA: LIBERTY CITY STORIES



Just the name *Grand Theft Auto* is enough to make the gaming fraternity stand to attention. Those three words are now synonymous with a cultural phenomenon, the single most important intellectual property in all of videogaming. The combination of the number one brand and Sony's latest attempt to swallow the mass market – the PlayStation Portable – is money just waiting to be printed.

If there's a single gamer not impressed by their first look at *Liberty City Stories* running on the crisp wide screen, we'll eat our hats. We're not quite sure how Rockstar has managed it, but the game is an immense technical achievement – simultaneously a showcase for the raw power of the PSP and testament to the ability of the developer. *Liberty City* itself is presented in all its grimy urban glory, running smoother and cleaner than *GTAIII* (despite some slight blurring), and proving as intoxicating as ever. Within minutes you'll be up to your old tricks, throwing drivers onto the pavement, beating up shoppers, jumping off buildings on motorbikes… the possibilities are once again limited only by player imagination.

However, as perfect as it may seem, *Liberty City Stories* has one overriding problem: seasoned *Grand Theft Auto* players will find the story missions all too familiar. While still fundamentally enjoyable, they are too reliant on the basic 'kill everyone' or 'lose the cops' stock formulas that have served the series so well in the past. Therefore, actual progression through the plot becomes unfortunately arduous and the infamous *GTA* difficulty spikes make a return to frustrate already tired souls.



To combat this, Rockstar has seen fit to include a Wi-Fi Deathmatch mode that caters for an amazing six players. If you've seen the movie *Series 7*, you should know what to expect: six people hunting each other down in a fully working cityscape (cars and pedestrians all present), and it's as superb as it sounds. It's trying to find five other PSP owners that's less exciting.

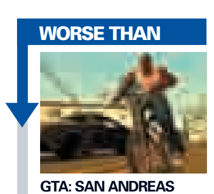
Despite re-treading old ground, *Liberty City Stories* is an unabashed success. *Grand Theft Auto* is all about creating your own experiences and moments – very few games have the character and personality to allow you to be happy just existing in their game space. This lets you do that in the palm of your hand, and it would be unfair to ask for more.

FIRED UP



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



GTA: SAN ANDREAS

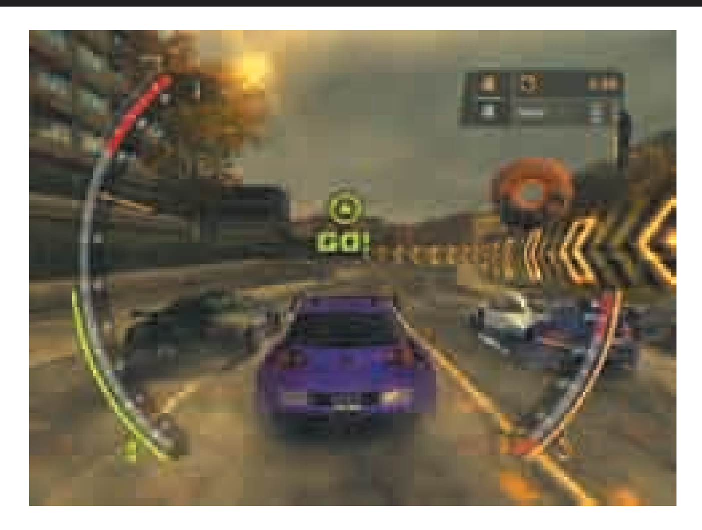
VERDICT 8/10
TECHNICALLY INCREDIBLE, IF A LITTLE OVER FAMILIAR



Zealous *GTA* fans may find this too similar to others in the series… but at least you can put it in your pocket.



Old places, new faces – Rockstar has at least tried to spruce up the original streets of Liberty City.





Thankfully, the bling element has been consigned to the waste bin – and about time too.

NEED FOR SPEED MOST WANTED

YOU DON'T ALWAYS GET WHAT YOU WANT Y'KNOW

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
GameCube, PlayStation2, PC

ORIGIN
Canada

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER
EA Canada

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2 (2-4 Online)

The *Need For Speed* games are really good at dominating the charts. Nobody can deny this. Whether it's down to impressive looks, adrenaline-fuelled gameplay or the EA promotion machine is debatable, but it always manages to cling to the top spot for a fair old while. With Christmas on the way then, the charts are fair game once more and *Most Wanted* has turned up with exactly what casual gamers and misled mothers are likely to be after.

This title provides a handful of new tricks coupled with a mass of old ones, but it's not something that anyone's going to cry about due to the style that it's being delivered with. The whole thing looks pretty, has a reasonably decent plot behind it and features cut-scenes and characters that make you actually want to beat the 'Blacklist' drivers so you can get your 'phat ride' back – not a frequent occurrence in arcade racers.

Unsurprisingly though, it plays much like an *Underground/Hot Pursuit* hybrid with the races and customisation options you'd expect from the *Underground* games being complemented by the police chases and tense one-on-ones from *Hot Pursuit*. It's a good formula that delivers. There's not much more to be said about it – it works. Good job, EA.

The words, 'Oh good, they've managed to get a bullet time effect in', are some of the most printed in this magazine – they are the words that we spend the most time rubbing sarcasm on. The feature has made it in once again and in the case of *Most Wanted* it works well in an unnecessary kind of way, giving you the advantage when it comes to cornering and out-maneuvering police – things that are far more fun when the ability isn't available, actually. Also on show are a host of adequate new race types, and a decent – if mildly more aggressive than usual – soundtrack.

It's a nice, clean package that delivers enough hi-octane chases and enjoyment to warrant a purchase, but if you're one of the people who've followed the series, witnessed all the *Underground* games and seen what *Hot Pursuit* had to offer, then you're not going to be treated to anything that you haven't already seen plenty of times before.

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IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
MIX 'N' MATCH: High-speed chases and plenty of regular races, mean you get the best of both worlds.
SLOW-MO: The addition of bullet time works well, despite being unnecessary.

VERDICT 6/10
WE WANT IT A LITTLE BIT – ONLY A LITTLE

So… £20 on *Need For Speed* making it to the top of the chart this Christmas. It's a good bet.

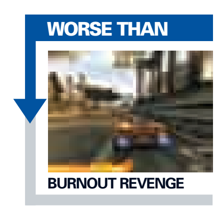


NFS UNDERGROUND



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



BURNOUT REVENGE

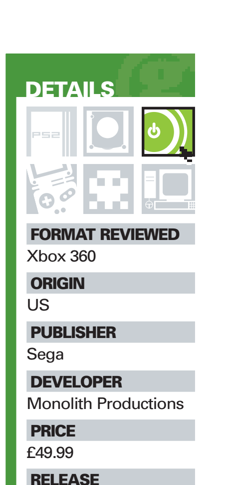
FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

NEXT-GEN HORROR: The advanced visuals and sounds create a spooky atmosphere.

GAMER SCORES: Collect all the hidden items in this game because they add to your Gamer Score.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox 360

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Sega

DEVELOPER
Monolith Productions

PRICE
£49.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

THE NEW FACE OF HORROR

CONDEMNED: CRIMINAL ORIGINS

Boo. Did that scare you? Thought not, but trust us; when you pick up a shiny new copy of *Condemned: Criminal Origins*, you'll be scared six ways from Sunday. True, it's certainly not the most technologically advanced title in the launch line-up, nor is it one of the most hyped, but what sets *Condemned* apart from the other next-gen games is that it achieves what it tries to do with frightening precision.

Monolith's latest, following hot on the heels of the magnificent *F.E.A.R.*, is a relatively unambitious title with one singular purpose – to frighten the life out of the gamer and provide the sort of thrills and spills you'd expect from a top-notch thriller movie such as *Se7en* or *The Ring*. It never pretends to be an epic tale of grandiose horror, nor a gothic odyssey into the very depths of hell: it's a simple, first-person cop adventure. This is, perhaps, *Condemned's* largest asset, but also its Achilles heel. Many will admire the beauty of the game for what it is: an intense journey through some of the most frightening on-screen scenarios ever rendered by a games console. An equally large number will also bemoan the lack of variety, and overall brevity of the game. Rushing through on Easy, with little regard for the extra items that can be picked up to bolster the player's 360 Gamer Score, the average player should be able to complete the game within six hours. Sadly, the linear nature of *Condemned* also somewhat negates any potential replay value, meaning that you get comparatively little entertainment time for your money. However, for fans of the horror genre – or indeed any sort of terror-orientated films – *Condemned* is one of the most intense and enjoyable games ever created.

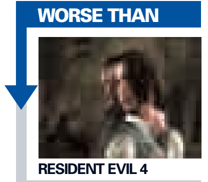
As a title that presents frightening set-pieces and jump-out-of-your-chair moments, this game is in a league of its own, almost surpassing the critically acclaimed *Resident Evil 4* in terms of visceral, horrific action. Monolith has clearly spent months working on and, indeed, perfecting the first-person melee combat, as it really does work within the game. The collision detection is always fair, and the actual impact of a piece of pipe or a spade on your enemies' flesh (or, indeed, on your own face) will always elicit a wince. When an enemy actually jumps out from round a corner to crack you in the mouth with a sign post, a conduit, or whatever else happens to be lying around at the time, it's a genuinely frightening moment and is more than likely to cause a little yelp of surprise from even the most jaded and experienced of horror fans.

BREAKDOWN



BETTER THAN

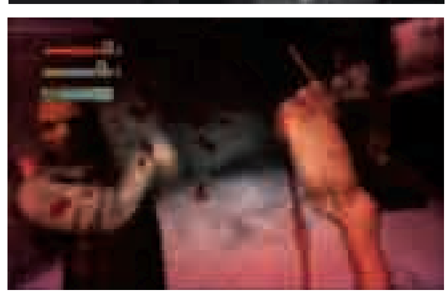
WORSE THAN



RESIDENT EVIL 4

It's not all violence, you know – there's also the forensic side of the game too.







Finishing people off is an incredibly satisfying and messy process. Nice.

DEADLY DEVIOUS

The AI in *Condemned* has been touted as the game's unique selling point, and after being pitted against some cunning enemies, it certainly seems that Monolith has hit the nail on the head. Your foes will hide around corners, run away to find better weapons, and even pursue you through a level if you don't finish them off properly. To stop their devious ways, why not execute one of *Condemned's* finishing moves and head-butt, punch, slam or break the neck of the submissive freak. Oh, did we mention that this game isn't for the faint of heart…?



■ Ahh, the Tazer gun – shockingly effective, no matter what the circumstances may be.



FAQs

Q. HOW NEXT-GEN IS CONDEMNED?
Criminal Origins really relies on its looks and audio to create the scares, so it's certainly next-gen in that respect.

Q. IS IT ACTUALLY SCARY?
You'd better believe it. Even the most hardened horror buffs will find themselves jumping in fright at some point.

Q. ISN'T IT A BIT LIMITED?
Yes, the game is very basic and this is probably why the developer opted to make it quite short.

Perhaps the real secret to *Criminal Origins'* frightening success is that the game is more reliant on next-gen visuals than any sort of massive leaps in gameplay dynamics. It's scary because the developer has been given access to the sort of lighting techniques and texture mapping software that has the ability to make levels seem truly foreboding. Each stage of the game is uniquely terrifying because of the details that the Xbox 360's technology has allowed the developer to include. Instead of making everything dark, Monolith has opted for smart lighting, weird and disconcerting surroundings, and some devious use of the console's sound capabilities. When it comes to the crunch and your palms are leaving a greasy residue of sweat on the pad, will you really be able to tell the difference between a shutter clattering in the wind, or a freak snapping some two-by-four off the wall to beat you to death with?

Admittedly, *Condemned: Criminal Origins* is far from perfect and is unlikely to set a new benchmark in what can be achieved with the Xbox 360's advanced technological capabilities. Yes, the character models look waxy and the last level is something of a farce compared to the rest of the game, but despite all this, *Condemned* remains a decent effort for a launch title. It may be short as hell, but it's a sweet, scary treat for horror fans and never pretends to be otherwise…





VERDICT 7/10
A SHORT, SWEET, AND SHOCKING 360 LAUNCH GAME





DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox 360

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Microsoft

DEVELOPER
Bizarre Creations

PRICE
£49.99

RELEASE
2 December

PLAYERS
1-4 (2-8 Online)

ANOTHER HEALTHY SERVING OF KUDOS FOR BIZARRE CREATIONS

PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 3

While the internet swells to bursting point with anonymous rage over next-gen games just being slightly better looking, surely we have to accept that some genres can do little other than get prettier and bigger. With racing games, for instance, where else is there left to go? Forza and GT-R have nailed serious handling, *OutRun 2* and *Burnout* perfected the arcade driving experience while games like *Gran Turismo* wouldn't honestly benefit from having more content. So if Bizarre Creations is happy to build on the foundations laid by its previous racers while pushing visuals and online integration far further than anyone else has managed, who are we to argue? No one, that's who. No one.

Project Gotham Racing 3 is an infectious and progressive driving experience such as we've never seen. At first glance, the racing action is familiar and almost underwhelming in appearance, however, the more you play, the more subtleties and effects begin to show themselves. Every lap you'll see something new, despite hurtling around at almost 200mph. The camera guy on the crane, filming your performance for replay purposes; the shattered wing mirror from that first corner Armco slam; the way reflections dance stunningly around your insurance nightmare in real time. Similarly, it's crazy how a virtual vehicle can grow on you. With enough credits flying around to put Han Solo's bounty to shame, your garages will fill up with cars you'll probably never drive – your driving style will lead you to develop favourites to complement it and you'll grow scarily attached to your F50 GT (or whatever your ride of choice turns out to be) to the point where driving anything else just feels wrong.

Packed with the high-end mean machines you usually only see halfway through a racer, *PGR3* both benefits and suffers from its new-found emphasis on adrenaline. With the game's slowest rides capable of 170mph, you'll have high-speed racing within minutes of turning it on. On the flip side, there's little of the sense of achievement that previous *Gotham* titles had upon finally getting your hands on an Enzo or a Saleen. Such monstrous machines do feel a bit quicker when paired against equally overpowered vehicles but its only on circuits with lengthy straights that they really distinguish themselves from earlier choices in anything but acceleration – the Nürburgring and Vegas courses that incorporate hefty portions of The Strip are perfect for such displays of power.

Aside from the Solo Career, there are plenty of other options to work your way up to the crucial online aspect. Quick races allow you to replicate the thrill of Live races and get to grips with the circuits while the course editor lets you build your own

Some of the cars available are just plain silly. And fast. And very, very shiny.



FAQs

Q. HOW MANY CARS?
A nice round 80, ranging from the little Ariel Atom right up to the sole remaining Ferrari F50 GT.

Q. HOW'S THE SOUNDTRACK?
Decent – nine genres and almost a hundred songs make the cut. Or you could rip your own custom soundtrack…

Q. SO I SHOULD BUY IT THEN?
Definitely. While there's nothing massively new, *PGR3* is easily the most solid and cohesive 360 launch title.

Talk about photo realistic – you could impress your aunt in Australia with these snaps.



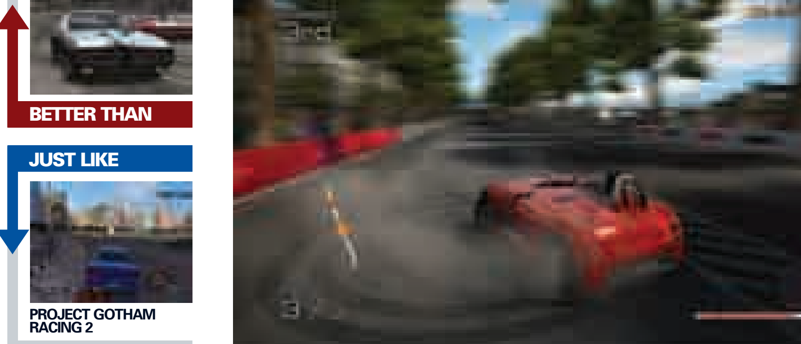
suitably evil routes around the four main cities in the game. New team-based modes are also a highlight of the online multiplayer, spanning options from simple races to Capture The Track (battling over each individual split section of a course). And on the subject of online play, just as *PGR2* set a new benchmark for Live integration, so too does its next-gen sequel – Gotham TV allows you to keep tabs on the progress of players on your Friends List as well as see how the racing elite are faring and pick up tips and tricks from Gotham's finest.

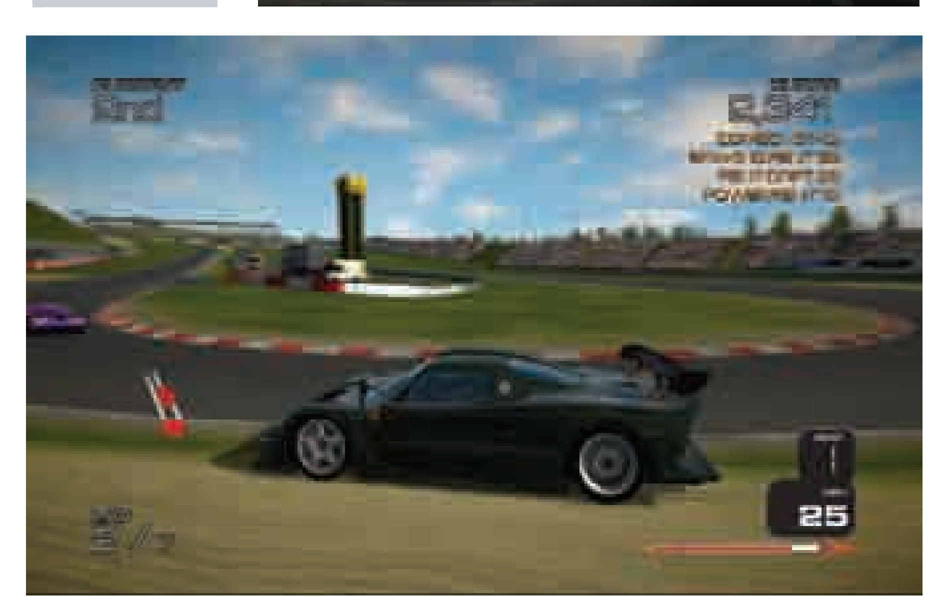
Constant rewards and new cars help keep the game interesting right to the close and even after blitzing the game at Silver level, there's a world of work to do before many of the later concept cars even become available. With an in-game rank also governed by total Kudos, you'll need to take on the challenges at Gold and – if you dare – Platinum levels to even be in with a shot at making *PGR3* your bitch, not to mention all those players lying in wait online who've done nothing but win races since the moment the game launched. Catering for all levels of player – both on and offline – there's no question that Bizarre Creations has dumbed down the game to some extent in order to open it up to the widest possible audience. And while this sounds like it should be a bad thing, it's far from it; there are plenty of expert-level cars that can be made to shine in the hands of a skilled player while anyone can hop into a more forgiving ride and get around a course in a fairly respectable time. An empowering, engrossing and downright gorgeous racer, *Project Gotham Racer 3* is definitely among the best games to ever launch alongside a console.

VERDICT 9/10
A ROLLING START FOR MICROSOFT – SIMPLY BEAUTIFUL

I WANT MY GTV

Gotham TV is *PGR3's* unique approach to online play and is undoubtedly going to be copied. A lot. Simply put, it allows you to watch your own highlights to see where you've been going wrong, watch the pros at work to see where you can shave off a few more seconds or watch your friends race – and laugh at them when they spin out on the last corner and limp home in last place. With tens of thousands of spectators able to tune in to any given event, regular competitions are likely to get particularly heated for that coveted spot on Gotham TV and with in-game awards for doing just that, it's going to be on every player's to-do list with precious few of them actually getting to live the dream. Just don't mess up with thousands of pairs of eyes on you, eh? No pressure or anything…





RARE DELIVERS AT LAST, BUT HAS IT BEEN WORTH THE WAIT?

KAMEO: ELEMENTS OF POWER

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox 360

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Microsoft

DEVELOPER
Rare

PRICE
£49.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

Anticipation is usually a good thing. Having to wait around for something that's likely to be quite enjoyable is only sweetened further once the object of desire actually arrives. However, we never thought anticipation would enter into the deal while we patiently waited for *Kameo: Elements Of Power* to escape the development process. It's been locked away for years now, being tweaked to perfection, but with hindsight the thought of wanting a game that effectively takes the age-old formula of pitting element against element and providing themed temples to conquer, seems a little foolish.

Still, anticipate it we did, and we're glad to say that we feel mildly less foolish now that we've seen the game through to the end and found it to be every bit as enjoyable as we'd hoped. The plot, naturally, is suitably twee; after having her family kidnapped by her evil half-sister, your character Kameo must embark on a fire, water, grass and earth-drenched mission to recover them and foil the plans of both her traitorous sister and Thorn, the troll king. So far, so fairy-like.

Underneath this layer of saccharine, the missions in the game are separated into side quests, temple conquering, troll hunting and aiding the elves in the epic battle that continually rages on in the Badlands; an area that acts as the hub leading you to the other themed lands where Thorn's evil resides. Each is suitably varied to keep things interesting, the power-stealing Dark Trolls being the highlight – largely because they look genuinely nasty.

Comparisons with *Ocarina Of Time* are inevitable, and we wouldn't be surprised if many cast aside the fact that the 360 manages to provide a fantasy world that seems more real and lush than has ever been achieved before, and frown upon the title for its lack of originality. Of course, the game does have one trick up its sleeve: the ability to change the lead character into a selection of frankly awesome-looking elemental beasties (although yes, we are aware that Link did something similar in *Majora's Mask*).

It's this character-switching element that provides the title with most of its gameplay. Collecting the 11 creatures, learning their unique abilities and flitting between them at the correct

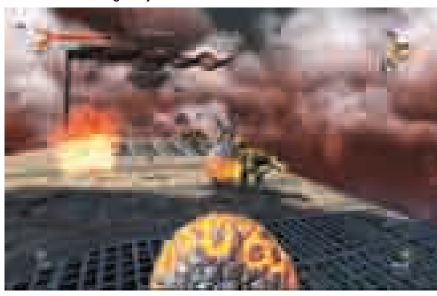
games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
EYE CANDY: Although many 360 titles will look good, there's just something so pretty about *Kameo*.
PICK AND MIX: Once collected, there are a total of 11 characters to switch between at any time.



Kameo looks like a dream – although with its aggressive plantlife, it'll feel like a nightmare.

There's a healthy mix of characters, but you'll only use a few of them regularly.









FRIENDS TO THE END

As you work your way through *Kameo* and complete the missions in the single-player campaign, you'll unlock levels for the Co-op mode. This will allow you and a friend to take on the main areas of the game as a team and attempt to achieve high scores to unlock goodies. Most of these treats take the regular form of artwork and movies, but skins for the characters are also up for grabs and these are far more likely to tempt people to give the Score Attack modes a go.



times is what dictates success in most cases and, although we still feel it's bettered by *Banjo-Kazooie*, it's easily as well thought out as Rare's other successes in the genre – and this is a good thing.

Of course, the fact that some of the ideas and areas are so clichéd does take a little away from the experience and, at times, you're certainly likely to find yourself grimacing. We're now entering a new era of gaming and in a time when certain companies are revealing that we'll be controlling games with a remote control-like device fairly soon. As such, having to explore a forest temple, followed by a water temple and then an ice temple is a little hard to swallow. Also, the characters could have benefited from being a little more balanced. Creatures such as Blizzard and Major Ruin are continually used in union throughout the game. In fact, if you reach a dead end or become stuck in any way, there's a fair chance that it's one of these characters that you'll want to select. On the opposite side of the coin, upon receiving 40 Below, you get to use his abilities twice before he's rendered useless. This is the case with several creatures and as they have all been created and designed so well, it's a shame that more wasn't done to create the necessity for their use.

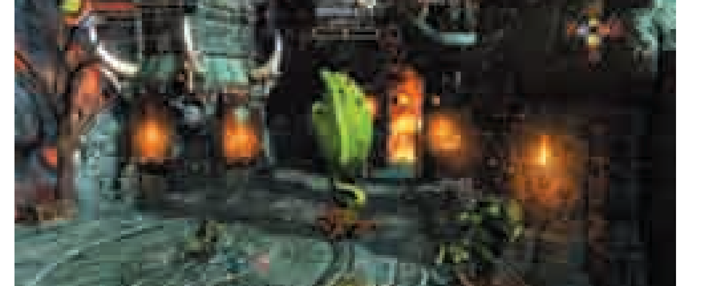
Certainly, Rare has done well with *Kameo: Elements Of Power* and it's nice to see the developer back on form – especially after the tiresome *Grabbed By The Ghoulies* – but as enjoyable and refreshing as *Kameo* is, we can't help but feel that it would have been better received long ago on the GameCube, as was originally intended. It would have flourished in a time when games of this type were loved and appreciated, rather than being an experience that reminds you a little of *Star Fox Adventures*. Still, with great looks and plenty of gameplay on offer, it's definitely worth picking up to see exactly what your shiny, new 360 can do.

FAQs

Q. WHO'S THE BEST CHARACTER?
Despite being fairly useless, Flex is our favourite. He's made of jelly stuff.

Q. SO, IT'S A TOP-NOTCH LAUNCH GAME THEN?
There are flaws, but it's still an enjoyable romp.

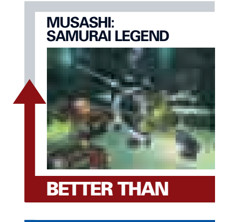
Q. IT CERTAINLY LOOKS NICE?
It does. Some areas are more pleasant than others, but there's a very cute feel to the game.



VERDICT 7/10
RARE'S BACK ON TRACK



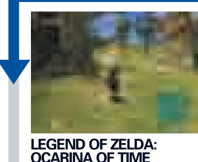
MUSASHI: SAMURAI LEGEND





BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME



Going in a straight line is so passe – swing the tail end about a bit and earn some nitrous.

Oh sweet Jesus, it's like MC Harvey all over again. Just a race or two in, you'll want to kill the announcer. Hard. With something blunt. As you cruise around, he gibbers away at you; a caffeine-drenched, over-excitable gimp who whoops like an American journo in a *Halo 3* presentation every time you do something that is commonplace in every other racing game. Thankfully, a trip to the game's menu enables you to drop said imbecile down to zero volume, allowing you to enjoy a cocktail of engine noise and gabba-mash nonsense without his irritating interjections. Some 15 tunes make up the soundtrack and although you can't use custom soundtracks off your hard drive, you are able to plug in an iPod or similar device and tear around to whatever music you wish. Assuming, that is, that the classic *Ridge Racer* mix of dodgy techno and early 90s-esque beats isn't to your liking.



RIDGE RACER 6

'SO LONG SONY' FOR NAMCO'S ONE-TRICK PONY

You can use nitrous quickly or better still save it up for double or triple boosts which are as good as they sound.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox 360

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER
Namco

PRICE
£49.99

RELEASE
January 27 '06

PLAYERS
1-2 (2-10 Online)

Perhaps the most surprising thing for an arcade racer such as this is the distinct lack of a sense of speed. The only real thrill comes with nitrous use, particularly noticeable at high-level play – the ingenious Ultimate Charge system gives a massive amount of extra boost for drifts performed just as a turbo charge comes to an end, making it possible for skilled drivers to chain nitrous in a manner not dissimilar to *Burnout 2*. In addition, different tracks offer their own sensations of speed, so while the wide city tracks never make you feel like you're going that fast, winding country roads offer far more nail-biting moments. And since you'll need to go back to the Class 1 cars on at least a couple of occasions in the main mode alone, you'll feel even more stung on the speed front as you crawl around courses like a crowd of people on a leisurely Saturday afternoon drive to Asda.



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IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

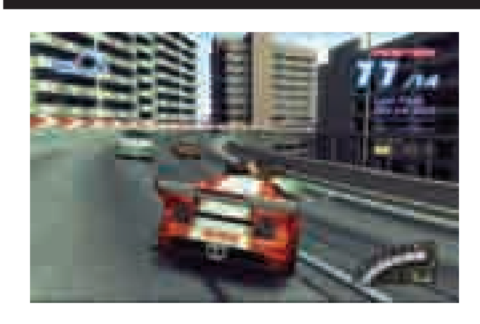
BOOST/DRIFT: Clever combinations of nitrous and powersliding are rewarded with yet more juice.

A LA MODES: Traditional races to special events, one-on-one showdowns to boost-free events.

Getting near the front of the pack isn't really a problem. Overtaking the leader, however, can be hellishly tough.

But if you can overlook the fact that much of the game isn't up to speed (for want of a better phrase), there's almost too much to do. A sprawling grid of challenges is laid out before you and rather than participate in single events or designated tournaments, you're able to pick your own path through the races. It's not quite as free as it first seems but the system does make for an interesting way of unlocking cars – finishing every race that surrounds a question mark opens up the contents of the area – usually a car rather similar to one you already have but hey, you can't have everything. Even getting to the end of the massive grid isn't any kind of achievement; each of the three basic goals on the far right yield another whole

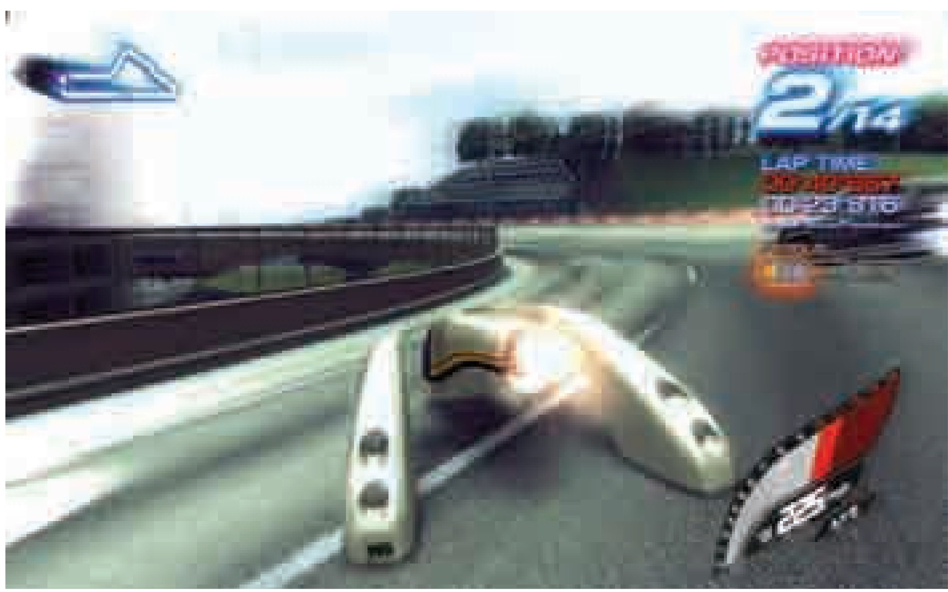




A LINK TO THE FAST

It should come as no surprise to hear that *Ridge Racer 6* is laden with Live features, extending its longevity on top of the many standard races the game throws at you. Online racing, rankings and rewards add greatly to an already overflowing package and once you've got your drifts down in the offline game, you get to take your skills to the online arena and see if you've got what it takes to keep up with the big boys. By which we mean unemployed people with only one game and nothing else to do with their time. So yeah, you might lose.





new tree of races upon completion until you're swamped in revoltingly tough competitions.

What little variety there is among races is welcome, but as an arcade racer, no one is expected to sit down for hours at a time and plough through *Ridge Racer 6*. It's a game to be enjoyed little and often and if you do just that, there are literally months' worth of enjoyment on the shiny new disc. It's not without its problems though – the way the camera jumps when drifting too close to walls is massively disconcerting and there are only so many times you can watch the AI drivers use a double nitrous injection that they couldn't possibly have accrued by the second corner without screaming naughty words at your TV. This gets particularly frustrating in the Duel races, where one slip-up can be enough to make you lose sight of your boost-happy opponent.

While the game's HUD and early stages can't disguise the fact that they've come straight from work on the PSP version without getting changed, *Ridge Racer 6* soon opens up into its own game. With the Ultimate Charge system and a little track knowledge, there's potential for some sick chain boosting and you can bet your ass that the online playground will be full of kids who have got said skills down to a tee. As arcade racers go, *Ridge Racer 6* is as straightforward and by-numbers as they come, but who would have expected any less? Even so, it doesn't stop it being great fun in its own over-the-top way. It's not the best game of its ilk – hell, it's not even the best in its own series by some way – but anyone buying a Ridge Racer game knows exactly what they're getting and won't be disappointed with this shiny and seemingly unending racing bonanza.

VERDICT 7/10

NOTHING NEW, BUT AS GOOD AS IT EVER WAS

FAQs

Q. HOW MANY EVENTS ARE THERE?
We actually lost count when the Advanced and Expert levels started to roll out. You're looking at 50+ hours of racing…

Q. GOOD TUNES?
An acquired taste. They work well in context but it's hard to sit in the same room as them if you're not the one playing.

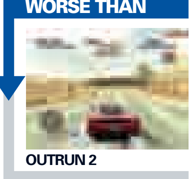
Q. ANY GOOD UNLOCKABLES?
Special Class is full of speedy and unique rides, including a pimped-out van, retro-themed concepts and surprises.

RIDGE RACER V



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



OUTRUN 2


eMag



RETRO
MICRO GAMES ACTION
A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.39 DEC 2005
00p
THE MONTHLY OLD-SCHOOL SOFTWARE REVIEW
INTERVIEW WITH A LEGEND
GEOFF CRAMMOND
XYBOTS
BEHIND THE SCENES
MAGICAL FLYING HAT
HAT'S YOUR LOT!
STUNT CAR RACER
RETRO REVIEWS
Tecmo Classic Arcade and Midway Arcade Treasures: Extended Play inside!
PLUS
RETRO NEWS,
GREAT GAME MOMENT,
BUYERS' GUIDE,
ULTIMATE COLLECTION,
RETRO CONTACT
AND MUCH MORE...
GOOD-YEAR

RETRO NEWS

Find out what's going on in the here and now of retro gaming

As the old saying goes, time and tide wait for no man and I'm sad to say that this will be my last ever editorial for Retro. The time has come to hand the reins over to another, and while I'm pleased to have outlived my last two predecessors, it's saddening to think that I'll no longer be sharing my favourite moments from gaming's varied and wonderful past with you.

I have always looked on The Retro Section as my opportunity to sit back and shoot the breeze with our many loyal readers and I'm going to miss hanging around sites likes Rllmuk, NTSC-UK and, of course, **games**™ in order to see how the magazine (and in particular, of course, The Retro Section) is being received.

One thing you should remember, though, is that while I may no longer be around, retro gaming itself is not going to lose momentum any time soon, and with every year that passes each console will continue to get steadily older. Still, for the moment you can rejoice in the fact that Geoff Crammond has offered us an exclusive interview, and that Ed Logg has granted us the complete low-down on *Xybots*. Plus we have all the usual retro reviews and features. Now, that's not a bad way to bow out…

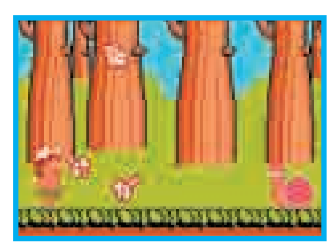


Darran Jones, Retro Editor

DOING IT PROPERLY

HUDSON SHOWS NINTENDO A THING OR TWO ABOUT RE-RELEASING NES GAMES

The recent NES classics were a double-edged sword for us. While we loved the opportunity to re-visit classics such as *Metroid*, *Super Mario Bros.* and *Castlevania*, we were less than impressed with the over-inflated price that Nintendo expected us to pay. All hail Hudson, then, as it will be releasing several compilations of classic NES hits over the coming months. In all, six volumes are planned for the GBA with the *Bomberman* and *Lode Runner* collections available already. The *Action* and *Nazotoki* collections will be available from 22 December, while you'll be able to pick up the *Shooting* and *Boukenjima* (AKA *Adventure Island*) collections in the new year. Each compilation will feature between two and four titles and will cost in the region of ¥3,804 (or around 18 of your English pounds). Sadly, Hudson currently has no intention of releasing them outside of Japan – so you may like to give your local importer a call.



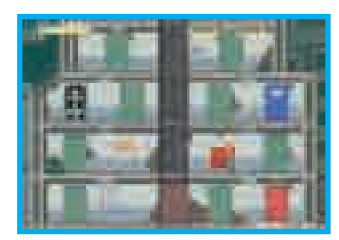
MORE MEMORIES ON THE WAY

EMPIRE AND TAITO ANNOUNCE TWO NEW COMPILATIONS

Despite some games not being as arcade perfect as we first thought, the excellent *Taito Legends* has still been receiving ridiculous amounts of playtime. So you can imagine how overjoyed we were when Empire announced that a second compilation is to arrive early next year, complete with 40 games from the recent Japanese collections.

That's right, *Elevator Action Returns, G-Darius, Crazy Balloon* and *Don Doko Don* are just a few of the expected titles, so gamers are going to be very busy indeed. No price has been decided yet, but with any luck Empire will stick to the same £20 price point that has made *Taito Legends* so popular. Still, if the conversions on offer match their Japanese counterparts then we'd happily pay twice that.

Amazingly though, there's even more great Taito news in store as yet another compendium of classic hits has been announced for the PSP. At the moment it will only be available in Japan, but the list of games is already getting us excited – *Rainbow Islands Extra, The New Zealand Story* and *Qix* are just a few names mentioned. Taito has also revealed that there will be 2005 updates of *Crazy Balloon, Balloon Bomber, Legend Of Kage* and *Cameltry*. In all, 20 games are to be included so there should be something for everyone. It's unclear if *Taito Memories Pocket* will hit the UK, but considering the success of *Taito Legends* we certainly expect it to. If you're the impatient type you may want to head over to a Japanese website such as YesAsia, as it's due for release out there at the beginning of January. Just make sure that the site you order from allows you to import…



TAITO MEMORIES POCKET
THE COMPLETE LIST

Alpine Ski, Elevator Action, Rainbow Island Extra, Crazy Balloon, Chack'N Pop, Lunar Rescue, Balloon Bomber, Legend Of Kage, The Fairyland Story, Rastan Saga, The New Zealand Story, Raimais, Cameltry, Qix, Kiki Kaikai, Kuri Kinton, Crazy Balloon 2005, Balloon Bomber 2005, Cameltry 2005, Legend Of Kage 2005.



THE LIAR OF ZELDA

RETRO COMMUNITY IN UPROAR AS ZELDA III FOR THE NES SURFACES

As far as many gamers are concerned, the third *Zelda* title was released on the SNES and went under the moniker 'A Link To The Past'. Now it would appear that *Zelda III* was initially going to be released for the NES. While not confirmed by Nintendo, a gamer known only as Okibi is convinced that he has a prototype of *The Legend Of Zelda III*.

If that wasn't strange enough, a second copy (which Okibi claims to be a fake) was recently put up for sale, only to be taken down again and has apparently been sold for a staggering $3,000. The new owner, known only as Knight 7, intends to dump the ROM and start selling it illegally for profit. He's also printing t-shirts featuring a copy of the cart in question with the slogan: 'I was bidding on the Zelda III prototype and all I got was this lousy t-shirt'. Basically, anyone who buys the t-shirt from him will receive their ROM before the rest of the community.

It will be interesting to see how Nintendo reacts to this news, possibly verifying whether the fabled cart actually exists. As expected, many respected internet sites are rife with discussion as to the game's authenticity and many feel that the recent eBay cartridge is little more than a hacked game, others have suggested that Okibi's claims about owning an original are also a lie. Still, a recent copy of *Bio Force Ape* for the NES recently surfaced at an American flea market, while a letter from Nintendo suggests that a NES version of *Zelda III* could (only could, mind) actually exist.

At the time of going to press, though, nothing has actually been confirmed by the Japanese developer. If Nintendo's lawyers do decide to start knocking on doors, we'll soon have our answer…



▲ The cart as it was seen by desperate bidders around the world. Somehow, we're not convinced.



▲ However, we would considering getting ourselves a t-shirt – if only to prove how 1337 we are.

Retro DIARY

As old-school gaming gets more popular, it's about time everyone knew about upcoming retro releases and events...

DECEMBER '05

The Retro Ball

Dates: 3-4 December **Location:** The Wardens Cricket Club, Kenilworth
Price: Saturday £7.50; Sunday £5; Weekend £10
It's finally here, after months of waiting for this huge gaming event we're ready for what promises to be a most exciting weekend. We've been practising long and hard to hone our gaming prowess, digging out those old tapes for our heroes to sign and trying to work out how much alcohol we'll be able to consume before losing the ability to hold a joypad. This is going to be big.

Namco Museum 50th Anniversary Arcade Collection

Date: TBA **Publisher:** Namco **Price:** £19.99 **Format:** Xbox/PlayStation2
The Xbox and PlayStation2 get a dose of old-school arcade action with this collection of 14 Namco titles. The likes of *Pac-Man*, *Galaxian* and *Pole Position* jostle for space with *Rolling Thunder* and *Galaga*, and Namco has even included plenty of classy 80s tunes to sing along to. Anyone know the words to *Come On Eileen*?

Taito Memories Pocket

Date: 5 December **Publisher:** Taito **Price:** £29.99 **Format:** PSP
Okay, so it's a shame that it's forgotten to include *Bubble Bobble*, but *Taito Memories Pocket* still looks to be a must-have compilation. There's no news of an actual UK release yet, but considering how popular *Taito Legends* proved, Taito would be a fool not to. Let's just hope that the conversions are better than the recent *Midway Arcade Treasures* compilation…

JANUARY '06

Hundson Best Collection Vol5: Shooting Collection

DATE: 19 January **Publisher:** Hudson **Price:** £19.99 **Format:** Game Boy Advance
Of the six compilations that Hudson is releasing it's the shooting version that we're most looking forward to (although, the *Adventure Island* pack is also looking pretty sweet). We're huge fans of shmups, so being able to go back to *Star Force, Star Soldier* and *Hector '87* is too good an opportunity to miss.

Capcom Classics Collection

Date: TBA **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** TBA **Format:** PlayStation Portable
No, this is not a printing error. The PlayStation2 and Xbox versions aren't even out yet and Capcom has already announced that its excellent new Retro compilation will be appearing on Sony's PlayStation Portable (hopefully, at the beginning of next year. Best of all is the announcement that it will include two exclusive new games, *Side Arms: Hyper Dyne* and the excellent *Strider*. We can't wait for this…

Sega's Treasure Box

DATE: TBA **Publisher:** Sega **Price:** TBA **Format:** PlayStation2
This is what the fans have been waiting for. Details are still extremely sketchy at the moment, but what we can tell you is that *Treasure Box* is set to include some of Treasure's greatest 16-bit moments. *Gunstar Heroes, Dynamite Headdy* and *Alien Soldier* have already been confirmed, but we're hoping that even more games will be added. Hell, we'd even auction off our grannies for Treasure's complete back catalogue on one shiny disc. We have out fingers crossed that Sega doesn't disappoint us this time.

If you know of, or are hosting any other events, please contact us at gamestm@paragon.co.uk.

CLASH OF THE TITANS

F•L•Y•I•N•G S•H•A•R•K

As gaming infiltrated the home market a new breed of gamer evolved. Dubbed the 'fanboy', he associated himself with a certain genre, machine or even a developer or publisher, and then ridiculed all who opposed him. First observed in playgrounds in the early Eighties, typical arguments revolved around who had the better machine or which game looked best on which format. We aim to put a stop to years of petty squabbling by finding the definitive versions of some classic titles. This month it's the 8-bit computer versions of the rock-hard shoot-'em-up, *Flying Shark*.

ROUND 1: VISUALS

COMMODORE 64: We've seen some garish visuals in our time, but the eye-blinding graphics of this C64 conversion are bordering on the offensive. It's all very well having silky smooth scrolling and the sort of chunky visuals that wouldn't look out of place on a Duplo set, but it still doesn't forgive the cat vomit-styled sprites here.

SPECTRUM: Never mind the fact that there are only ever two colours on screen at any one time, we're still rather smitten with this neat Spectrum conversion. Okay, so the actual scrolling moves about as quickly as a one-legged man in an ass-kicking contest, but the detail on display is very impressive and does a good job of capturing the spirit of the original arcade game.

AMSTRAD: As usual, poor old Amstrad finds itself stuck in the middle, displaying the very best and worst features of its 8-bit siblings. While the scrolling speeds along, it's let down by a dull Spectrum port that means it uses a very basic colour palette. It's adequate, but we're still giving this first round to the Spectrum.

WINNER: SPECTURM
RUNNER UP: AMSTRAD

ROUND 2: AUDIO

COMMODORE 64: Normally we'd expect the C64 to win this category, but it actually puts in a surprisingly low-key performance. Ironically, it still sounds a lot better than the Amstrad and Spectrum incarnations (mainly due to some strong spot effects), but we were expecting a hell of a lot more from the SID chip. Shame on you…

SPECTRUM: You have to love the Speccy, you really do. While some talented coders managed to get the sound chip to really sing, the majority of compositions often sound like they've been burped out by a Casio calculator. Sadly, *Flying Shark* is no different and the end result is a dirge of a ditty that's married to some pretty uninspiring spot effects. Oh the humanity…

AMSTRAD: There's very little separating the Amstrad and Spectrum ditties, but if Clash Of The Titans was a game of Russian roulette then it would have been the Spectrum that had its keys splattered all across the TV screen. The Amstrad's slightly better tune and solid spot effects are the only things that save it.

WINNER: COMMODORE 64
RUNNER UP: AMSTRAD (JUST)

ROUND 3: GAMEPLAY

COMMODORE 64: Competent is the kindest way to describe this lacklustre conversion. While not as slow as the Spectrum, it still tends to amble along with all the grace of a knuckle-dragging buffoon with a gammy leg. Granted the bullets are much easier to avoid, but as you've already been blinded by the putrid visuals, it really makes little difference. Best to go back to *Uridium*.

SPECTRUM: It may have aesthetics licked, but when it comes to gameplay, the Spectrum version of *Flying Shark* is in trouble. The most notable problem is that it features none of the hectic gameplay of the original and moves with all the haste of two pensioners taking a stroll along Blackpool pier. Some ridiculously hard-to-see bullets finish off the inevitable coup de grace.

AMSTRAD: Ben Kenobi would no doubt say that 'The Force is strong in this one' before realising that *Flying Shark* is, in fact, a game and not a Jedi. Needless to say, this Amstrad adaptation manages to tick all the boxes and deliver a decent alternative to the original game. If only the bullets were a little easier to spot…

WINNER: AMSTRAD
RUNNER UP: SPECTRUM/C64

AND THE WINNER IS…

AMSTRAD

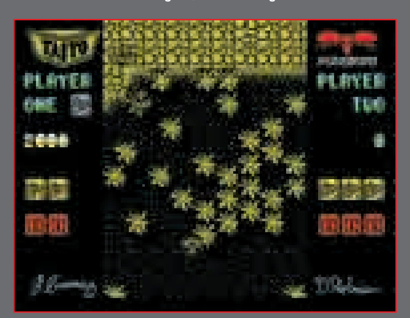
After months at the top, the C64 has been ousted. While Spec fans will no doubt accuse us of playing a different version of *Flying Shark* to everyone else, the fact is that it's not that great anymore, especially when placed against the (slightly) stronger Amstrad outing.



Good old Amstrad – finally, it's your time to shine. Oh yes.



The Commodore version's good, but not enough to be the winner.





FLYING SHARK (Various Home Systems) Taito, 1987 – Original UK advertisement



MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES

EXTENDED PLAY



Midway has had a fairly strong run with its *Arcade Treasures* series, even if the franchise has progressively worsened with the last couple of releases. While its back catalogue is nowhere near exhausted, the company has decided to release a selection of games that have already appeared on its first two collections. Now it's taken a portable slant and has had Digital Eclipse port the likes of *Gauntlet*, *Defender* and *Mortal Kombat* to Sony's PlayStation Portable. Sadly, the results weren't as we expected, mainly because hardly any of the games are in their correct ratios. Most have been stretched beyond recognition to fill the screen and the end result is some extremely bizarre conversions. Still, perhaps you should find out for yourself…



A COLLECTION OF CLASSIC RETRO GAMES IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND? WELL, SORT OF…

SYSTEM: PlayStation Portable **PRICE:** £34.99 **PUBLISHER:** Midway **DEVELOPER:** Digital Eclipse

KLAX

***Tetris* is proof if proof were needed that puzzle games are perfectly suited to handheld gaming, and while *Klax* may lack the simplicity of Alex Pajitnov's universally fun brick game, it's a game that's equally fun to play.**

Countless tiles make their way toward you down an escalator and the aim is to sort them into rows of three or more (commonly referred to in the game as Klaxes). Each stage gives you a different task ranging from surviving a set number of tiles to creating a number of Klaxes – the later stages get wonderfully frantic. A superb puzzler that works beautifully on Sony's handheld.



MORTAL KOMBAT II

The first thing you notice about *Mortal Kombat II* (after the awfully long loading times, that is) is just how fantastic it looks on the PSP's screen. Baraka, Johnny Cage and Raiden have never looked better and the sharp resolution of the screen really shows off Midway's – at the time – unique design. Sadly, once you actually start playing, it turns into a shambolic mess and a complete mockery of its arcade parent. The game often slows to painful levels and the PSP's D-pad makes it virtually impossible to pull off any of the game's recognisable moves – something that *Mortal Kombat 3* also shares. A pair of truly shocking conversions.



PAPERBOY

After the mediocrity of the *Mortal Kombats*, we had quite a few reservations about taking *Paperboy* for a spin. Our fears were unjustified though, as this portable outing turned out to be pretty damned good. Granted, the sound is far from perfect – which is actually a problem for many of the games on this compilation – but the actual gameplay does remain wonderfully intact. In fact, our only real complaint is that many of the fast-moving sprites suffer from an annoying amount of blur which can be very off-putting. Other than that minor issue, this is effectively *Paperboy* in the palm of your hand.



SPY HUNTER

***Spy Hunter* looks terrible – it's as simple as that.** Rather than turn the PSP on its side and use the original game's vertical orientation, Digital Eclipse has simply stretched the game in order to fill the width of the screen. However, as you might imagine, the end result is an ugly, blurred mess that will have fans weeping in the streets. While it's perfectly playable, the crackly sound and bizarre-looking visuals rob *Spy Hunter* of any real authenticity – another shockingly poor conversion that we were surprised to see make the cut (especially when titles like *Robotron: 2084* and *Smash TV* fail to materialise).



RAMPART

This is a lot more like it. *Midway Arcade Treasures: Extended Play* is certainly proving a rather mixed bag when it comes to accurate conversions. No such problems for *Rampart* though – and it's a good job as well, as it was one of the titles we anticipated the most. Essentially, what we have here is *Rampart* on the move – and it really is excellent. That damned D-pad lets you down from time to time, but it's nowhere near as bad as on other titles. Again, we could have done without the awful crackly sound, but if you're after an interesting slant on the puzzle/strategy genre, then *Rampart* is an essential buy.



XYBOTS

We're not including Ed Logg's futuristic shooter because we've just finished writing a massive four-page spread about it, but it's made the cut because its amazing fun to play. The arcade's quirky control system is perfectly suited to the PlayStation Portable (the shoulder buttons rotate your view) and you'll find *Xybots*' short frenetic mazes ideal for gaming while on the move. However, it's ironic that one of the least popular games on the entire compilation – *Xybots* was never a massive hit – has actually been treated to one of the best conversions of them all. Not that we're complaining, of course.



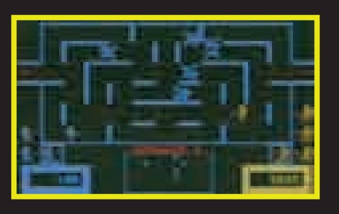
GAUNTLET

When it was released in 1985, *Gauntlet* was an immediate hit thanks to its hectic action, simple yet enjoyable gameplay and the ability to team up with three other players. While the ability to play with three other players via Wi-Fi is still available, the control system is broken beyond belief, leaving *Gauntlet* a shadow of its former self. No matter how hard we tried, it's virtually impossible to hit certain diagonals. This is true of both the D-pad and analogue nub and the end result is a frustrating experience that sees you battling more against the controls than the monsters you're up against. Woefully disappointing.



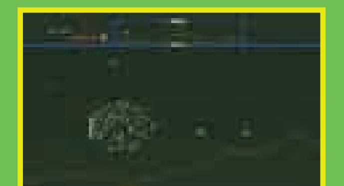
WIZARD OF WAR

Amazingly, we totally forgot about this when it first appeared on *Midway Arcade Treasures 2*, which is a shame as it's a great little blaster, albeit a very archaic one. As with *Xybots*, *Wizard Of War*'s quick-and-easy gameplay is perfectly suited to the handheld, and sees you hunting through a series of mazes while taking down monsters. It's also one of the strongest conversions on the compilation and features none of the problems that have ruined many of Midway's other classics. If you're after an intense blaster to test your reactions to the limit, then look no further than this game…



DEFENDER

The original *Defender* is a highly desirable arcade game that now fetches ridiculous prices on eBay, especially if you're lucky enough to find one in mint condition. Fast action, wonderfully sharp visuals and a complex-looking but surprising intuitive control system are all hallmarks of *Defender*'s pedigree, so we don't understand why it is that they haven't all made it across to the PSP. Like *Spy Hunter*, the visuals have been stretched to fill the entire screen and now look little like the original arcade machine. Add to that the fact that the PSP's D-pad and control layout are ill-suited to *Defender*'s needs and sadly, you have yet another ruined classic.



720º

We weren't too impressed when we played this early skateboard title on the original *Arcade Treasures*, so imagine our surprise on discovering that the PSP version actually ain't that bad after all. Sure, the thrash metal soundtrack now sounds, well, trash, but the gameplay itself is pretty damn good. Your skater is extremely easy to control and you'll find that speeding around Skate City is a wonderfully satisfying experience. While the visuals have been slightly stretched, it's not as noticeable as on other titles and screen blur has also been kept to a bare minimum. A solid conversion.



AND THE REST

- *ARCH RIVALS*
- *CHAMPIONSHIP SPRINT*
- *CYBERBALL 2072*
- *JOUST*
- *MARBLE MADNESS*
- *MORTAL KOMBAT*
- *MORTAL KOMBAT 3*
- *RAMPAGE*
- *SINISTAR*
- *TOOBIN'*
- *XENOPHOBE*

SUMMING UP

As you may have guessed, we have mixed feelings about *Midway Arcade Treasures: Extended Play*. For every game that has been lovingly ported across to Sony's handheld, there are at least two others that had us wincing in pain. It's shocking to see how poor some conversions are and we can't imagine why Digital Eclipse has been unable to emulate the success it found on the Xbox and PlayStation2. Oh, and you're paying an unforgivable extra £15 pounds for inferior conversions. Let's hope that *Capcom Classics Collection* won't suffer the same problems.

OVERALL 51%



T·E·C·M·O CLASSIC ARCADE

Retro Review

NOT QUITE AS CLASSIC AS IT SHOULD BE

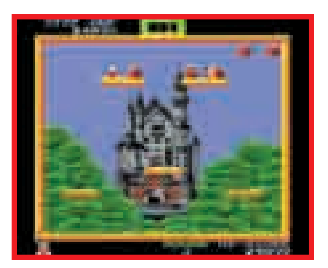
Format: Xbox **Publisher:** Microsoft
Developer: Tecmo **Price:** £19.99
Games Included: Tecmo Bowl, Rygar, Star Force, Solomon's Key, Pleiads, Senjyo, Pinball Action, Strato Fighter, Swimmer, Bomb Jack, Tecmo Cup

Tecmo. It's been making arcade titles for over 20 years, created the wonderful *Dead Or Alive* series and has proved something of a saviour for Japanese Xbox owners. So it's not surprising that it's decided to release a compilation of its past arcade hits. What is surprising, though, is the sheer amount of hit titles it's actually forgotten to include…

Shadow Warriors, *Gemini Wing*, *Dead Or Alive* and *Silk Worm* are just a few hits that are glaringly absent, and while a few classics remain, it's nowhere near the ratio that other recent compilations have achieved. As with the recent *Sonic Gems Collection*, *Tecmo Classic Arcade* really relies on a select few titles to sell it; in this case, it's *Rygar*, *Bomb Jack* and *Solomon's Key* – three classic hits that retain all their original charm and playability.



▲ *Star Force* or *Strato Fighter*? We know which one we'd rather play… although neither are great.

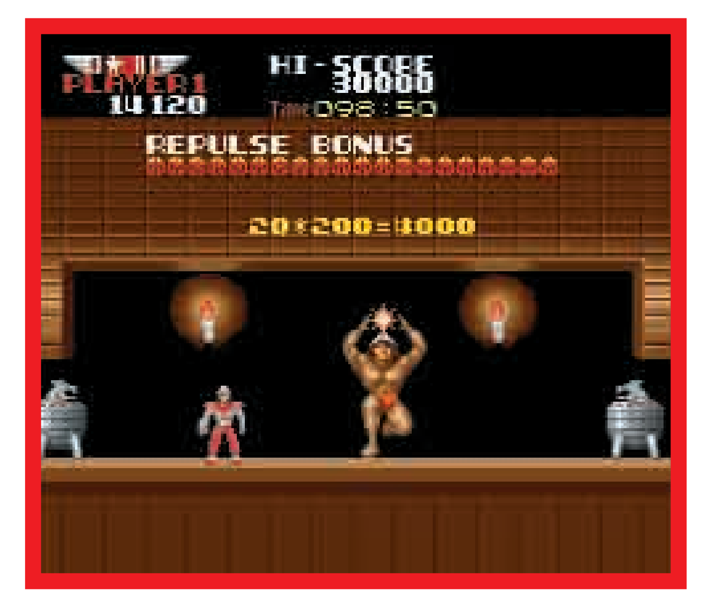


▲ *Bomb Jack* is just as good as it was originally, so it's good to see it at home in this new collection.



▲ *Rygar* – so good, they made it again… except like *Devil May Cry*, only not as enjoyable. Oh well.

Bomb Jack in particular is absolutely superb and remains incredibly addictive. Each level sees you collect a number of bombs – with bonus points awarded for collecting them in a specific order – while avoiding a variety of deadly opponents. As a result, the gameplay is incredibly frantic and reveals an impressive depth as you try to work out the best way to clear each bomb. It's a solid conversion only let down by the absence of The Beatles' *Lady Madonna*.



Luckily for fans of *Rygar*, Tecmo's scrolling slash-a-thon remains intact and while it's still frustratingly tough in places, it remains a challenging title. After all, who wouldn't want to run around with a spiked yo-yo, dishing out bloody carnage to anything stupid enough to get in the muscular hero's way? *Rygar* is by no means a stunner in the aesthetics department, but if you want solid, good old-fashioned gameplay, then you're unlikely to be disappointed.

Solomon's Key, on the other hand, trades brawn for brains and ends up being one of the most endearing games on the compilation. Each stage features a locked door, a key to open it and a number of blocks to negotiate. The aim is simple: nab the key, reach the exit and avoid the beasties along the way. While the blocks are initially laid out in certain patterns, you can use your trusty wand to manipulate them so that they phase in and out of existence. As a result, you're able to pretty much go wherever you want on each stage and can reach each exit in a variety of ways.

Considering the quality of these three games, it's a pity that Tecmo has included so many duffers to make up the rest of the pack. The two sports games, in particular, are crushingly dull and won't get even the most hardened of sports fanatics tingling, while *Pinball Action* isn't going to thrill anyone who's played *Devil Crash* or *Psycho Pinball*. The one saving grace (in our eyes) has been the addition of several shmups, but even this failed to get our juices flowing once we saw what was on offer. Without doubt, the best is *Pleiads*, an intense shooter featuring some interesting gameplay mechanics, plenty of bright, well-detailed sprites and boisterous spot effects. *Strato Fighter*, although innovative for its time, is about as enjoyable to play through as watching *The Phantom Menace*. *Star Force*, on the other hand, is a pretty damn solid blaster, but just doesn't have enough to it.

And that's the biggest problem with *Tecmo Classic Arcade*: there's no real substance on offer. In the past year, compilations have come a long way, but Tecmo seems to have conveniently forgotten this. Either that, or it's cynically planning to save the rest of its games for next year…

OVERALL SCORE 55%

SUPER GHOULS 'N GHOSTS

Release: 1992
Format: SNES
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-House

It wasn't an easy job being a knight. Not only did you live in a time when your genitalia was constantly shrivelled up due to being encased in metal, but you also had to face off against unruly peasants, tyrannical kings and giant, fire-breathing dragons. Sir Arthur fared even worse, however, as Capcom made him the hero of its *Ghost 'N Goblins* trilogy, and bloody tough they were too…

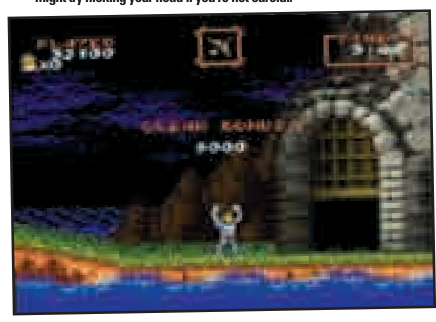
Take *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* for example. You started off in the sort of graveyard that would give the presenters of *Most Haunted* the willies, and as you fought your way past undead zombies, rabid dogs, flaming skulls and swollen pods it didn't get any better. Reaching a large clearing, the beleaguered knight came up against the biggest bird he'd ever seen. Appearing as a bizarre cross between a bird of prey and an over-sized chicken, your nemesis immediately closed in.

Lance (or whatever other weapon you picked up) at the ready, you gingerly back-pedalled in order to gauge the giant bird's first line of attack. Your feathered foe immediately coughed up a giant egg, which then proceeded to hatch into a ferocious mini eaglet. Easily dispensing your new adversary, your triumphant smile instantly evaporated when the powerful boss stretched his neck across the entire screen and gave you a nasty bite – instantly robbing you of your precious armour. Forced to run around in your heart-covered undies the remaining battle resulted in either you slaying the annoying beast or ending up as a polished pile of bones… either way though, it was a battle you'd never forget.

WHO YOU CALLIN' CHICKEN?



▲ Polly want a cracker? Probably not… although he might try nicking your head if you're not careful.



Great RETRO Gaming Moments

BLOW IT UP… THEN BLOW IT UP AGAIN

STAR WARS



Release: 1983
Format: Arcade
Publisher: Atari
Developer: In-House

Blowing up the Death Star has been a staple part of most *Star Wars* games for, ooh, we don't know… forever. And while enhanced graphics made the experience incredibly lifelike, we'd trade it all in an instant for Atari's original arcade game.

Despite being over 23 years old now, *Star Wars* remains a beautifully crafted game, further enhanced by its fantastic wireframe visuals and impressive smatterings of speech. But we're getting ahead of ourselves – back to blowing up Death Star…

After destroying countless waves of TIE Fighters, it was time to journey into one of the most famous trenches of all time. Hardcore gamers went straight to the Medium and Hard difficulty settings, meeting the Death Star's first line of defence – some bloody big towers. Those wanting less of a challenge, found themselves diving straight into the trench and one of the best moments in gaming.

Pulsing with excitement, your fingers became slick with sweat from all the shooting, and your breath came in short, ragged gasps.

"Yahoo! You're all clear kid. Now let's blow this thing and go home." With Solo's words still ringing in your ears, the next few moments were sheer instinct. The port was destroyed and you were moved a significant way from the Death Star to view your impressive handiwork. One spectacular explosion later and it was time to do it all over again…



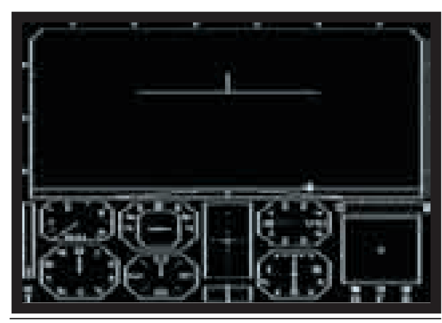
GEOFF CR

GEOFF CRAMMOND IS A LEGEND. AFTER WOWING BBC MICRO OWNERS WITH TITLES LIKE AVIATOR, HE MOVED ONTO THE C64, AMIGA AND ATARI ST. IN AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW, RETRO SHARED A FEW WORDS WITH THE GREAT MAN...

Geoff Crammond rarely does interviews. He isn't a recluse; he just likes to throw himself into his work and let the games speak for themselves. And they really do. He's been behind some of the most highly regarded titles of the last 25 years: *The Sentinel, Revs, Stunt Car Racer* and the *superb Grand Prix* series. Indeed, since *Aviator* appeared on the BBC Micro in 1983, he's been associated with the sim genre.

Although his games aren't exactly serious (see *Stunt Car Racer*) they all feature physics engines and a realism envied by other developers. You only need look at the *Grand Prix* series – easily the pinnacle of his career – to see how much energy he puts into each creation. It's a shame, then, that recent titles such as the much-anticipated *Stunt Car Racer Pro* have since fallen by the wayside. Still, a gap in his current work schedule gave Retro the chance to chat with 'Sir Geoff' about his illustrious career – an opportunity we didn't intend to waste.





▲ Aviator was incredibly advanced for its time and wowed gamers.







▲ Visually superior, but still just as playable as before – that's *Grand Prix 4*.

AMMOND

gTM So, tell us how you came to be in the videogame industry?

GC I bought one of the first BBC Micros. Months earlier I had an idea about writing some sort of flight simulator in 3D just for my own enjoyment. I wasn't actually thinking about a career in games. I played around with some BASIC programming which was easy enough to pick up because I already did FORTRAN programming at work. Frustratingly, I found the graphics too slow to do anything decent with and so, wanting to up the speed, I bought a book about 6502 assembler programming. I started experimenting with that and thought I would try writing a *Space Invaders*-type game in order to learn everything. It took me about three months and by the time I'd finished I thought it might be possible to sell copies on cassette by advertising it. At the same time I received an advertising brochure from Acornsoft, the software arm of Acorn computers, advertising other arcade-type games but nothing like mine. I rang them up and they were interested, so I took it to show them. They liked it and published it under the name *Super Invaders*.

gTM And what was it that initially drew you to the BBC Micro? Was the machine much easier to program than others?

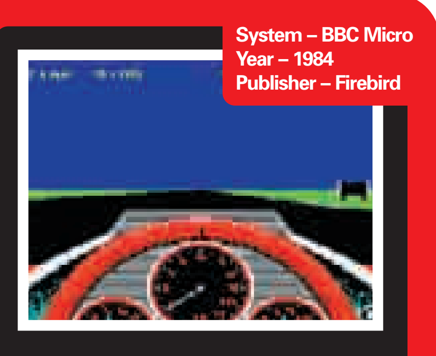
GC I saw it at a trade show at a time when I was thinking of getting a computer to play around with. It seemed to have the best spec of all the machines I had seen up till then. I was particularly impressed by the 320 x 200 resolution with four colours! I ordered it at the show and then, because it wasn't yet available, had to wait a further six months for it to arrive.

gTM One of your early titles was a Spitfire simulator entitled *Aviator*. It must have been quite tricky to recreate flying around in a plane on the BBC but you pulled it off perfectly…

GC It was what I had originally thought I would do when I bought a home computer. However, *Super Invaders* had just been published and so I developed *Aviator* expecting it to be published by Acornsoft rather than just doing it as a hobby – in the end it took me a year to complete. It was my first experience of writing real-time simulator code and I also had to learn about the principles of flight and the characteristics of the Spitfire.

I was completely hooked on what I was doing but realised I would have to leave work and do it as a full time job if I was to continue. I had been working evenings and weekends and had also been taking unpaid leave in order to get the game finished. My wife's patience was wearing thin as was my employer's. As soon as *Aviator* was published Acornsoft asked me to do a racing game. I would be working with a Formula 3 driver they were sponsoring called David Hunt (brother of F1 world champion James Hunt). I quickly agreed, left work and started games programming as a full-time career.

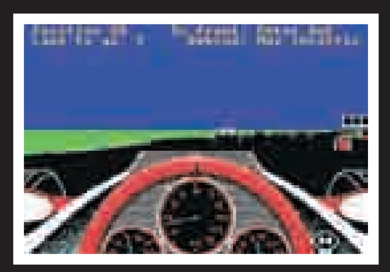




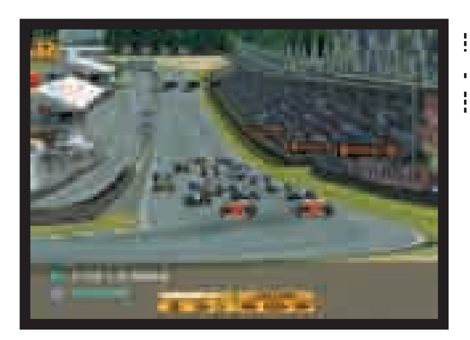
System – BBC Micro
Year – 1984
Publisher – Firebird

REVS

Never mind the fact that the original *Revs* only featured one track; it's still a stunning accomplishment. It may look a little rough around the edges nowadays, but the gameplay itself is still solid. The recreation of Silverstone was perfect considering the machine's limitations and *Revs* was further enhanced by its realistic physics – a trait of all Crammond's games – and some superb artificial intelligence. An enhanced version for the Commodore 64 appeared two years later featuring Brands Hatch, with a further three tracks, Donington Park, Oulton Park and Snetterton added to a second BBC Micro outing.



▲ Only one track, and yet the original *Revs* managed to keep BBC owners glued to their computers for hours.





g™ Tell us a little more about *Revs*. Did it take a long time to complete?

GC In all, *Revs* took me about a year to write. I had to derive a driving model and wanted to come up with fast, 3D, solid-filled graphics which were not at all common at that point in time. Fortunately, I was able to visit David Hunt's F3 team at Silverstone, which was owned and run by none other than Eddie Jordan, and was lucky enough to get close up to the car and receive reams of valuable technical data from his engineers.

g™ People are still playing *Revs* (someone recently posted a score time of 1:23.8 on Silverstone) why do you think the game remains so popular with gamers?

GC When I look at it now, I can't believe how primitive it looks, but at the time I was very much into driving it, honing lap times and I thought the graphics were fine. I think the brain gets used to limited resolution and colours. If the motion is realistic the brain is capable of interpreting the scene and fills in some of the missing detail, so I presume the gameplay must be rewarding enough to keep people playing it.

g™ How did your initial collaboration with Firebird come about?

GC After I had done *Revs* on the BBC, Acornsoft and I decided that I would do a conversion of *Revs* on the Commodore 64 since it also used the 6502 processor. Annoyingly, it only had half the clock speed so I had to rewrite a lot of stuff to speed it up by making use of the extra available memory. By the time I had finished it, Acornsoft had decided not to publish it as it was only supposed to promote Acorn Computers, so instead we did a publishing deal with British Telecom's Firebird.



“IF I SEE A GOOD IDEA IN ANOTHER GAME I FEEL MORE INCLINED NOT TO USE IT. I LIKE TO BE ORIGINAL”

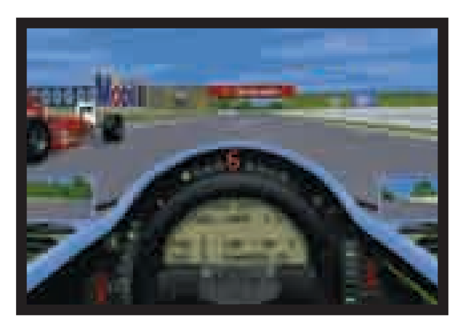
g™ After *Revs Plus* on the C64, you went back to the BBC and released an enhanced version with several new tracks. Was there much pressure to create a sequel?

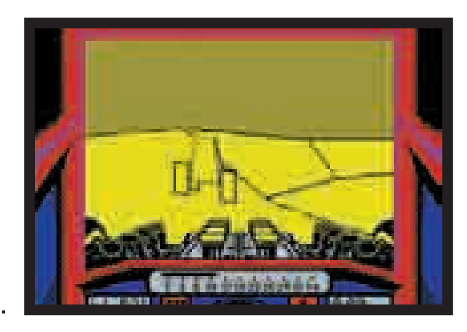
GC I wasn't aware of any pressure, but then Firebird was dealing with me via Acornsoft as far as *Revs* was concerned. Not long after *Revs* was published on the Commodore 64, Acornsoft decided to stop publishing games. I had already started developing *The Sentinel* which had taken me six months to write. Just before it was finished I took it in to show Firebird and they were so impressed that I entered into a contract directly with them.

g™ Tell us a little about *The Sentinel*…

GC I had the idea of the 3D landscape and moving around the landscape enjoying a real-time experience but without requiring real-time rendering. That is, you could render a scene from any viewpoint and it didn't matter if it took a long time to render. That meant that you would be able to have detailed scenery on machines like the BBC Micro and C64. I then realised that if the screen co-ordinates were mapped using the angle instead of the tangent of the angle then a scene could be scrolled across the screen with only the edges needing to be refreshed real-time.

Having had this technical idea I then had to think up some gameplay. I developed the





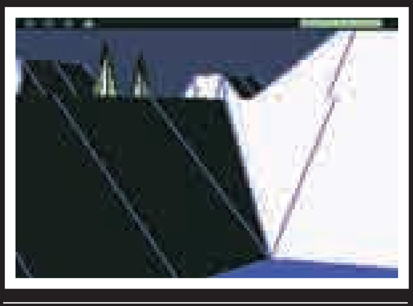




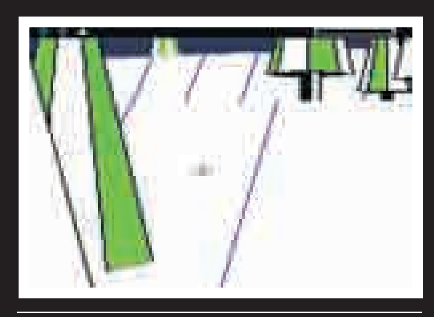
THE SENTINEL

System – Various
Year – 1986
Publisher – Firebird

The Sentinel proved quite a departure for Crammond, but is seen by many as his best work. A wonderful take on a traditional board game, *The Sentinel* saw you continually climbing the impressive landscape and eventually trying to absorb your titular enemy. Of course, while you were trying to reach your nemesis he was constantly searching for you and would deplete your energy once you were inevitably spotted (few will forget being scanned for the first time). Luckily, it was possible to recover lost energy by absorbing the essence of nearby trees – the end result was extremely atmospheric. *The Sentinel* certainly wasn't without its problems: it chugged along painfully on the 8-bit systems, but for many this simply added to the charm of *The Sentinel*. An absolute classic.



▲ Compared to Crammond's other more simulation-based efforts, *The Sentinel* was a real surprise – anelaborate game of hide and seek.



▲ Such a simple concept, and yet the tense atmosphere created as you stalked your enemy across the landscape was incredible.

landscape system and movement first and then gradually the game took shape. I capitalised on the idea of viewpoint being all-important. Perhaps the concept of mass = energy naturally flowed from my physics background.

gTM Was it disappointing when Firebird was sold?

GC No, not really. British Telecom had decided it no longer wanted to do games publishing and simply sold the Firebird and Rainbird publishing rights and contracts to Microprose. I then found myself signing a transfer agreement which I quite liked as Microprose was already well known for its simulation titles.

gTM Where did the original concept for *Stunt Car Racer* come from?

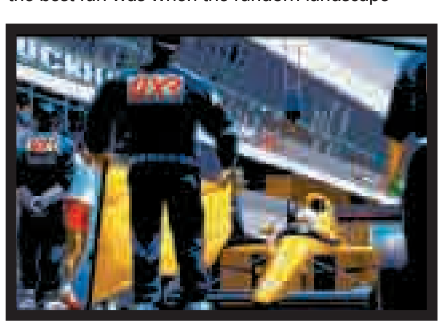
GC *Stunt Car* came about through pure evolution over the space of a few months. I started doing a game where a big-wheeled vehicle drove over a landscape with random terrain. I found that the best fun was when the random landscape happened to make a sort of ramp and the vehicle took off and landed some distance away. I then made the landscape into a flat plain with some ramps on it. There was a problem lining up with the ramps, so I eventually decided to join the ramps with a track, but to avoid driving off the track onto the plain it would be raised everywhere. I decided on banked corners, mainly because I didn't want it to be a road racing game where you have to brake, turn in, apex and exit; it also seemed to fit the idea of ramp driving, ie, wall of death-type driving.

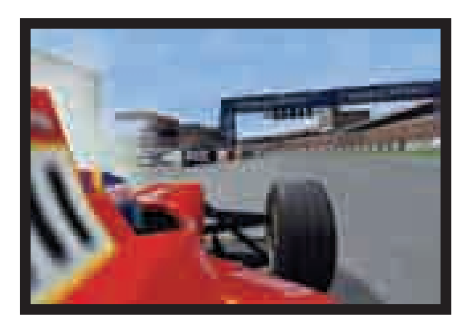
I toyed with various names like 'Stunt Buggy' but then with a front engine 'Stunt Car' seemed better. I was thinking that timed laps would be the challenge but found that it just needed the fun element of wheel-to-wheel racing, and so it became 'Stunt Car Racer'. Then I did the multiplayer mode with two linked machines because that seemed like good fun as well as an interesting technical challenge. That's how it came about – it took me about three years to complete.

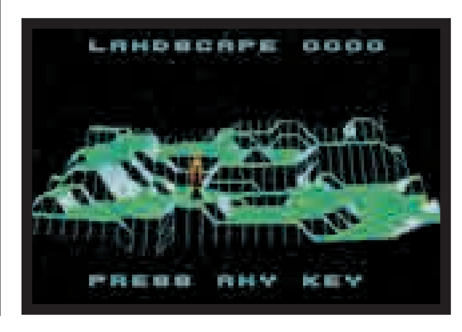
Someone once suggested in a magazine that I had been inspired by Atari's game called *Hard Drivin'*, but that absolutely did not happen. *Stunt Car Racer* was fully developed by the time I became aware of *Hard Drivin'* and then I only saw screen shots of a loop the loop which I didn't use. I have always found that if I see a good idea in another game I feel more inclined not to use it because I like my games to be as original as possible. For that reason, since my first game *Super Invaders*, I've always avoided looking at rival products, so that my hands are not tied. If I think of a good idea and later it turns out someone has already done it, then I don't mind it being in my game as well because I haven't ripped off the idea.

gTM Even today *Stunt Racer* has a superb realisation of speed and height. Why do you think it's remained so popular?

GC I think playability is always a vital ingredient for longevity. I spent a lot of time developing the driving model to allow cars to remain controllable



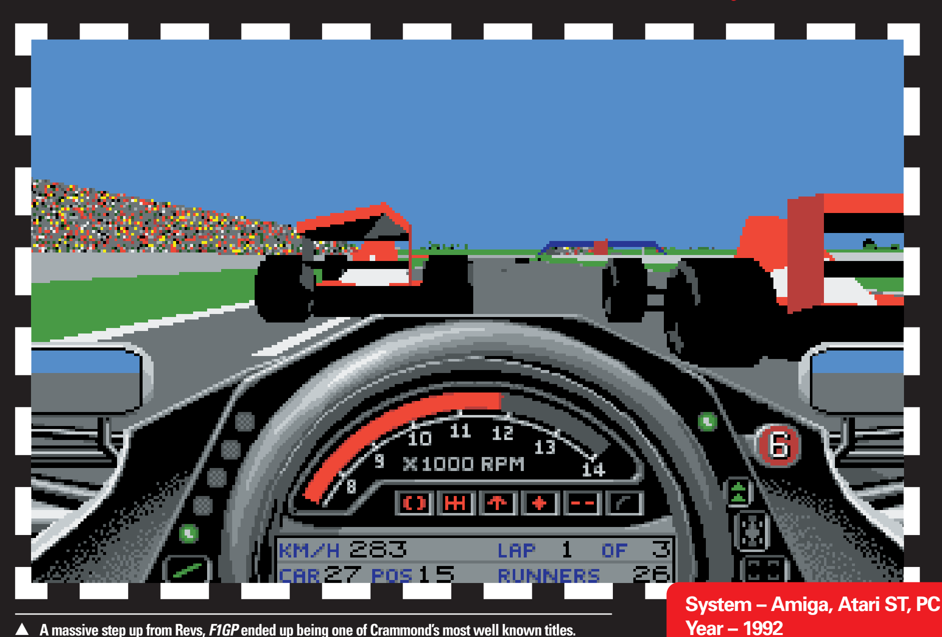






FORMULA ONE GRAND PRIX

Along with *Stunt Car Racer*, *Formula One Grand Prix* is the title that made Crammond a household name, and became a labour of love for him. Indeed, Amiga Power was so impressed with the finished product that it went on to dub Crammond 'Sir Geoff'. When you consider the amount of ground that *Grand Prix* covered, it's amazing to think that Crammond managed to get the game running at all. No stone had been left unturned and the end result was a staggering number of options that demanded to be learnt – and learnt quickly. Those hoping for arcade thrills would be in for a disappointment, but everyone else discovered one of the greatest and most accurate simulators ever made. Crammond returned to his beloved franchise over the next ten years, with *Grand Prix 4* finally debuting on the PC in 2002. With his five games, Crammond totally revolutionised gamers' perceptions of *Formula One* titles and created one of the most popular computer franchises the home computer market had ever seen. Who knows what he might accomplish if he ever made a sixth…



▲ A massive step up from Revs, *F1GP* ended up being one of Crammond's most well known titles.

System – Amiga, Atari ST, PC
Year – 1992
Publisher – Microprose

despite the punishment they take. And then there are the balanced gameplay elements to consider like the boost and damage.

g™ Were there any difficulties creating the 8 and 16-bit versions of *Stunt Car Racer*?

GC Well, I actually completed the C64 version first and then went on to create the ST and Amiga versions. Pete Cooke created the Spectrum version by converting it from the C64 code, while Tim Ansell completed the PC version before the ST and Amiga outings were available. In hindsight it might have been better to wait for them to be done first, but Tim did a great job converting the original C64 code. I see Tim's done very well for himself since then with his *Total War* stuff and getting to use his impressive engine for TV programs, I'm really pleased for him.

g™ Is *Stunt Car Racer Pro* still on the way? We're dying to know what's happened to it…

GC Unfortunately *Stunt Car Racer Pro* has now been cancelled. Lost Toys closed its studio and although I tried to revitalise the project with another team for another year I decided in the end, for various reasons, to finally call it a day.

g™ How did you find the transition from 8 to 16-bit computers?

GC I absolutely loved it. I've always liked getting more powerful machines with better graphics, because I can do things on them that simply weren't possible the first time around.

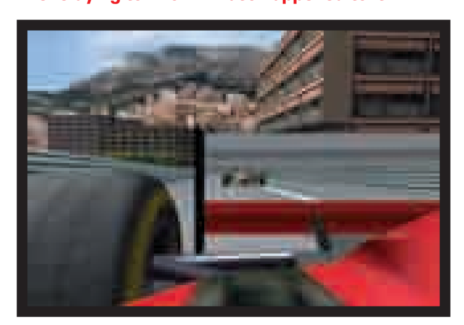
g™ Why the huge interest in Formula One? And why did you decide to create *F1GP*?

GC Ever since doing *Revs* I had remained interested in motor racing. I had started following the Formula One Grand Prix weekends and the fortunes of drivers such as Mansell, Prost and Senna. I knew I wanted to eventually create my own F1 game.

I then got a call from Microprose saying they were talking with McLaren about possibly doing a tie-in and wanted to know if I would be interested in writing a Formula One game. McLaren was a dominant team at that time and so it seemed like an ideal thing to do especially as it had been something I had already been considering. Although we did meet up with McLaren, a deal was never actually finalised. By then though, I was far enough advanced with *Formula One Grand Prix* that we could simply carry on without the tie-in anyway.

g™ The original game couldn't have been very easy to put together…

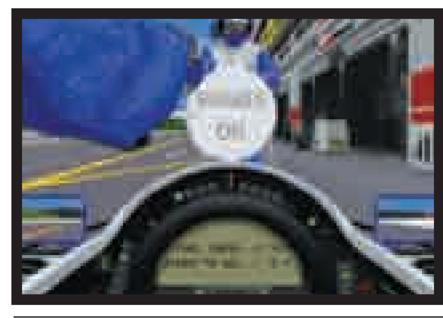
GC Like *Stunt Car Racer* it ended up taking me three years, and every aspect of the game was a challenge. I ended up having to create a new graphics engine, a new car simulator, driver artificial intelligence, sound, track system, pits with pit crew, pit stops with tyre changes and



▲ The famous Monaco track, perfect in every incredibly tricky detail.



▲ It might not look it, but *Revs* still compares favourably to other racers…



▲ Even mundane tasks like pit stops were made realistic in *Grand Prix 2*



▲ Why is it that from this angle, we're hoping that someone crashes?

wet-weather racing, marshalls to clear up the broken down cars, etc. Luckily, this didn't involve me having to work ridiculously long weeks. After I did one track I employed my brother-in-law Norman Surplus to use the track system to create the other 15 tracks in the game, and half way through the project Microprose hired Pete Cooke to do the menu code. Towards the end I hired my other brother-in-law to help with the test-driving and performance work. Everyone had a job that suited their talents, so I ended up with a very good team.

gTM You must have been really pleased with all the positive reviews…

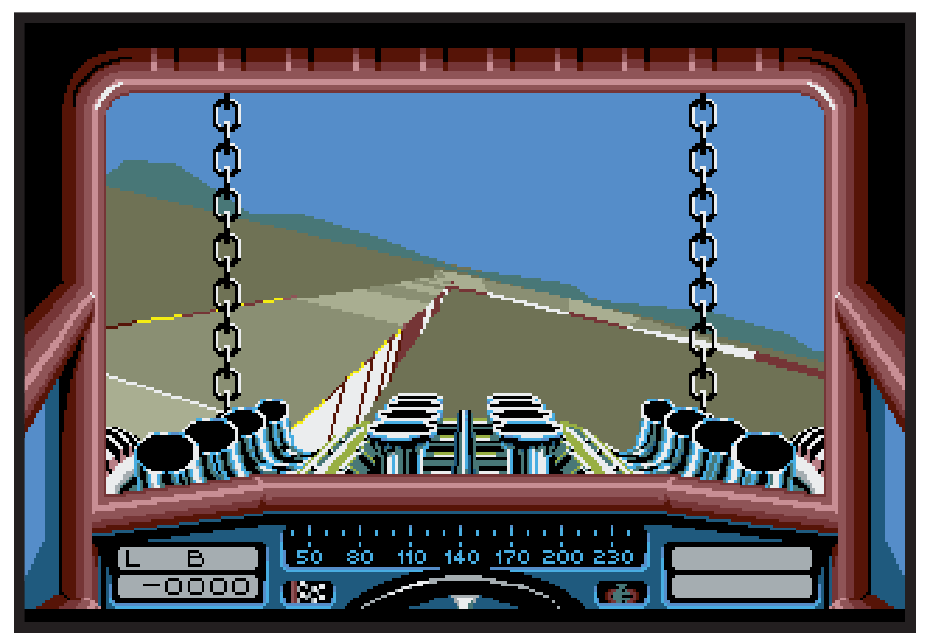
GC Of course I was, it was absolutely fantastic and a real spur to carry on developing the brand into something really special.

gTM The sequel took three years to arrive, why such a long delay?

GC To be honest, it seemed to take me about three years to do each *F1* title I worked on. The graphics engine was a big part of that because I had to write a texturing engine and everything – all the tracks and cars needed texturing. Also the simulator was extended to make use of industry standard tyre models and a full suspension model among other things, and the number of set-up parameters improved significantly. Other major things were the telemetry data-logging system and the break up of cars in collisions. For *GP2* Pete Cooke worked directly for me, Norman still did the tracks and David was spending more time driving and assessing performance. So it was a very involved process.

gTM *Formula 1 Grand Prix 3* doesn't now receive the same sort of respect as the other games in the franchise did, why do you think this is?

GC Well, when it first came out it got really good reviews and if you look around you'll see that five years on it's still a highly rated Grand Prix game. I suppose *Grand Prix 2* was such a big step up from *Grand Prix 1* that the expectation for *Grand Prix 3* was immense. If there was a problem it was, perhaps, that the graphics in other games coming out around that time made *Grand Prix 3*'s look a bit dated. Also a lot of the developments in *GP3* were not immediately obvious, particularly in the simulator and AI, for example, you can't do 'doughnuts' in *GP2*.



▲ That critical moment at the start, waiting as you were lowered onto the track before racing away… these are the things that made Stunt Car Racer great.

gTM *Grand Prix 4* was released to critical acclaim, but what happened to the proposed Xbox port?

GC The Xbox version was working extremely well and was, in fact, demonstrated to journalists. However, just after the PC version of *Grand Prix 4* was published, Infogrames decided to terminate the *Grand Prix* series and announced the closure of the studio. It's a real shame, but it was their right to make that corporate decision.

gTM The series is renowned for its amazing physics engine, how long did it take to create?

GC Each game in the series involved significant model enhancements/changes, so I suppose that you're looking at around 12 years of development by the end of *Grand Prix 4*.

gTM You're usually reluctant to talk to the press about your work. Why is this?

GC I've given several interviews over the years. One of the main reasons for not doing more has usually been because I've been too busy working on the code without the time or energy for anything else.

gTM Can you give us any hints on what you're currently working on?

GC I'm doing this interview… As far as other projects go, well, you'll just have to wait and see…

gTM So how do you spend your free time when you're not coding?

GC I spend as much of my spare time as I can with the family mostly, although if I can I do like to find time to play the odd game of tennis, golf and online poker. From a game's point of view I'm currently learning how to fly with *Microsoft Flight Simulator*.

gTM What do you think about the continued interest in retro gaming?

GC I think older games are excellent at giving the player instant accessibility, as you don't have to go through a big learning process to get in there and play it. Also, perhaps there is more variety of gameplay in the older games. Today, making games is so expensive that it's very risky to develop products that are completely different to anything else that's appeared before it.

gTM And finally, how do you feel about Amiga Power dubbing you 'Sir Geoff', and has anyone been brave enough to use it?

GC I saw that plaudit as recognition for the quality of my work and as such I really appreciated it. Although I'm pretty sure that nobody has actually ever used it seriously.

"OLDER GAMES GIVE THE PLAYER INSTANT ACCESSIBILITY. TODAY ORIGINAL GAMES ARE RISKY AND EXPENSIVE TO DEVELOP"



STUNT CAR RACER

Only a British coder could put some cheese on a helter-skelter and create the definition of racing joy

Release: 1989
Format: Amiga, Atari ST, C64
Publisher: Micro-Style
Developer: Geoff Crammond

YOU'VE BEEN SPOILED BY DOLBY DIGITAL

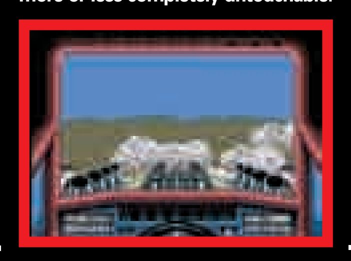
Stunt Car Racer may not have had the most believable engine sound, but considering that the game was set in the future (2008) who's to say that vehicles won't drone just like Crammond predicted? It wasn't the engine's noise that added to the racing experience however; it was the sound of grinding metal triggered when you started to ruin your car. This was the automotive equivalent of crossing fingernails down a blackboard with the response you'd expect should you find yourself bayoneting a screaming android to death. Beautiful. It was also given *coup-de-grâce* by an audio treat when you drove yourself to destruction, which sounded like a robotic gang rape in a saucepan factory.

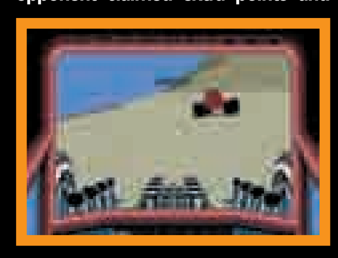
The Commodore Amiga 500 came in a box just wide enough to slip into a 60-litre rucksack. A minor detail, but an important one if it's 1989 and you intend to cycle the six miles from your house to your friend's and dabble with a hitherto seldom-used technology: serial cable link-up. 3.5-inch floppy disks could be bought in packs of ten and fitted snuggly in the complementary plastic case which, in turn, fitted snuggly in a side pocket. Goodbye, farewell and adieu, weekend: hello hours of link-up *Populous, Falcon* and that most truly wonderful of games *Stunt Car Racer*.

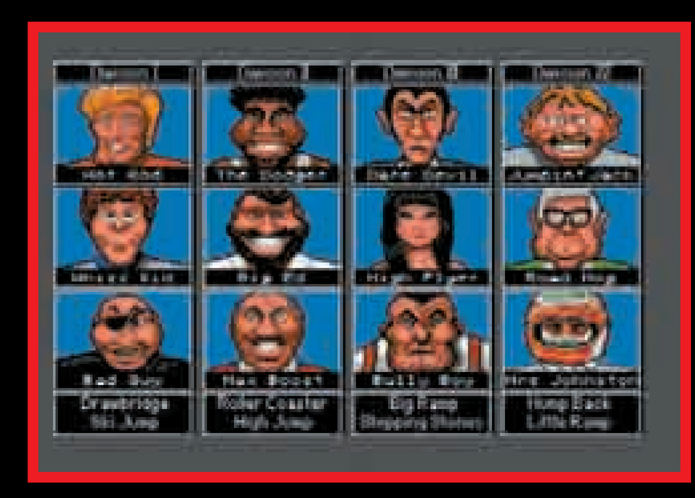
It's easy to get romantic when considering a game that brought friends together, but what makes one third of Geoff Crammond's finest hour worthy of classic status is because it still plays as excitingly today as it did (Jesus!) 16 years ago. 16-bit technology provided enough backbone to enable raised tracks based on humps and jumps and a rival car that looked like the offspring of the union of a roller skate and a doorstop. It moved with incredible slickness while the chunky physics engine provided the perfect mix of fat-wheeled bounce and leviathan weight to make precise use of a nitro boost that was ingratiatingly essential for pumping tracks that featured multiple jumps placed one after the other. Power sliding may have still been *OutRun*'s bounty, but when it came down to a genuine sense of physicality then *Stunt Car Racer* was more or less completely untouchable.

It wasn't just a physics engine and a steady frame rate that made *SCR* such a joy. Its personality was so strong and its coding so tight that the Commodore 64 version was equally worthy of celebration. It was a charmer in all aspects of its design, from the simplicity of its ethos to the design of its damage system.

Treat your car with disdain, slosh it round corners or skim the rim of the track with your underbelly and you would encourage a crack to run from the left to the right of the top of your chassis. When it completed its journey, you were wrecked and your opponent claimed extra points and









▲ Those massive ramps really took a lot of your car if you hit them wrong – one mistake and it's all over…

won the race. There was no billowing smoke or rattling metal clanging on the side of your ride to ruin your race, but there was certainly no denying the sinister nature of this simple crack. You knew you were hurting your baby when you treated it so bad, and it wasn't pleasant.

On top of this unique damage bar came the use of permanent structural damage inflicted should you take a hill at high speed or the wrong angle and plant it into the block colour of the desert below and you would earn a hole drilled to the right side of the structural damage bar, effectively shortening its length and therefore how much more casual damage you could take. These holes would last for an entire racing season and provided breathtaking moments when Player One would enter a race partially destroyed but with no penalty to handling. Victory came with a sweetness that could induce a digital diabetic coma of pure joy.

Serial link-up was not the game's *raison d'être*, of course; it was a capability available only to the lucky that owned the technology and the will to carry a large box a great distance, and so *Stunt Car Racer's* artificial intelligence comes into focus. Opponents had characteristics reflected in their names. Some were cautious and pedestrian and provided tortoise-and-hare lessons on the tortuous tracks; some drove as though the driver was listening to Motorhead's *Ace Of Spades* while escaping a shotgun wedding; and some were just downright rude.

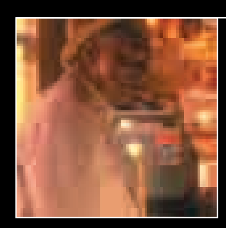
While most racing games have you start on the grid ready to go, *Stunt Car Racer* had you lowered from an unseen crane. This meant that the very first sensation was that of being a huge mass dropped from enough height to make the suspension of your wheels absorb your weight. Before you had even accelerated you knew you were heavy, and if you'd just been punished by a fall and were being placed back on the track, these moments provided ample time for adrenaline to course through your body and prepare for your comeback. Jaw clenched, eyelids retreating to take in the track. Ready. Steady. Go.

Is there a modern equivalent to *Stunt Car Racer*? Condemningly, no. Monster truck simulations and destruction derbies are pantomime in comparison, and the modern game's flirtation with its own take on 'reality' have meant that there is still a doorstop/roller skate gap in the market, ready and primed for a sequel – what a shame we're now unlikely to ever see one…





OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF 1989



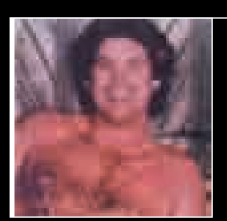
AT THE MOVIES

1989 was the year when Spike Lee was the most exciting director in America and *Do The Right Thing* was the absolute apex of his career. Racial tensions boil over during a hot summer in Brooklyn and the resultant dialogue was superb.



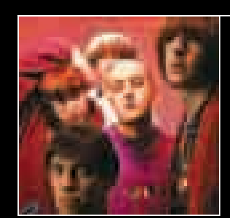
ON THE RADIO

"Close your eyes and give me your hand. Do you feel my heart beating, do you understand?" Both truly disgusting and epically beautiful, The Bangles' theme to a million school disco touch-ups was a slow-dance/grope favourite. Get on!



ON THE NEWS

After WW2, Berlin was split into two: East and West. It probably seemed like a good idea at the time. In 1989 the wall that divided the city came down. Was it worth it considering that the next year German rockers Scorpions inflicted *Winds Of Change* on us? No.



ON THE CATWALK

Get your giant Joe Bloggs jeans, wear a nasty and brightly coloured top and have a shit haircut and you were there, our kid. We'd like to be able to prove that teen pregnancies fell as a direct result of such idiocy, but they didn't. What. The. Hell.

Rising Sun Retro

16-bit consoles opened up a world of import gaming. With this in mind we'll be taking a look at some classics never released in the UK. This month we're cheating though, as Majikaru Hatto No Buttobi Taabou! Daibouken (roughly translated to Magical Flying Hat Turbo Adventure) was released here – the Japanese version is just miles better…



MAJIKARU HATTO NO BUTTOBI TAABOU! DAIBOUKEN

Release: 1990
Format: Mega Drive
Publisher: Sega
Developer: In-House

Think of classic Mega Drive platformers and your mind may drift back to the likes of *Castle Of Illusion* and *Sonic The Hedgehog*. Unless you were an import nut, it's likely that you've never heard of *Magical Flying Hat Turbo Adventure* – let alone played it. A shame, as it's one of the greatest platformers the Mega Drive ever saw.

With similar play mechanics to the Master System's *Psycho Fox*, *Magical Flying Hat* combined bold visuals with ridiculously jaunty tunes. The end result was a delight that proved that Mega Drive games were more than capable of competing with *Mario*. Oh, and that nobody did weird like the Japanese, of course.

While your main character looked normal, the world he inhabited was anything but. Like *Psycho Fox* you could team up with a partner; but while Fox's sidekick was a cute bird, *Magical Hat* teamed you with an egg with feet. Bosses looked outrageous too – once you've seen a fox and robot monkey astride something that looks like Thunderbird 2, nothing will surprise you in a videogame again.

After his initial jump, your alter ego could flutter for short distances by shuffling his baggy trousers and wiggling his cape. The 'jump on the enemy to kill them' routine was present and correct and you could also take out enemies with a swift blow to the chops. A selection of pills would also grant you special abilities – these dubious-looking items were changed for conventional potions in the UK release. Taking a pill made it possible to freeze enemies, change the length and power of your punches or even morph into a giant mecha-monkey. While it was possible to race through a level in a matter of minutes the more dedicated gamer would explore every nook and cranny, and when the levels looked as beautiful as they did in *Magical Hat*, dawdling wasn't a hardship. The game's inspired design compelled you to complete each stage.

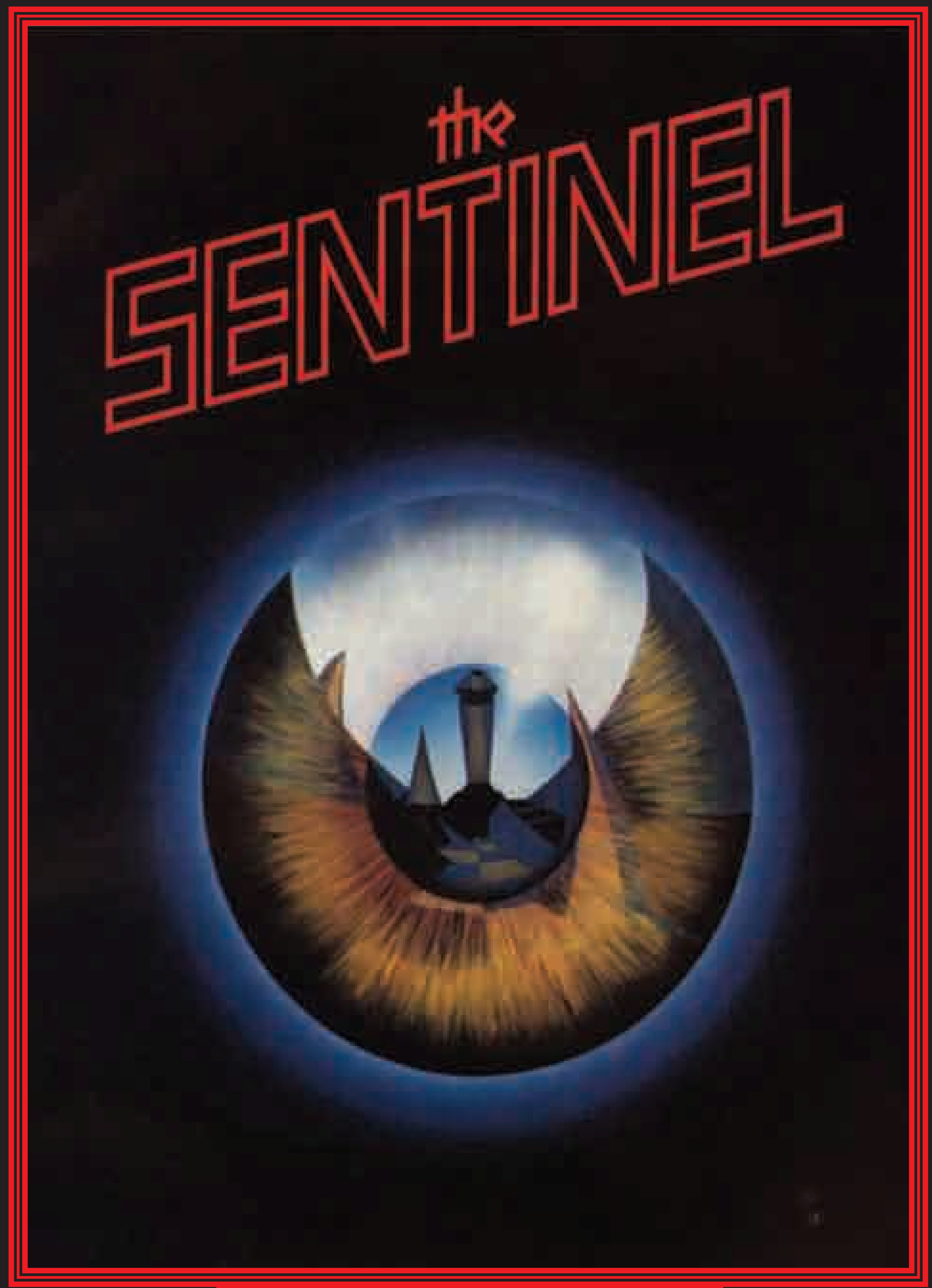
Despite looking cuter than a baby Ewok, Sega's game was tough, and working out the quickest route and learning which statues contained hidden monsters proved extremely beneficial. It was possible to avoid boss encounters altogether by retrieving a required item and then heading for the exit. If it proved too tough, Sega supplied a sneaky way of upping your life count. Certain levels contained bendy poles that your character could swing on – great for an extra lift, but jump on them correctly and you could net yourself up to 14 extra lives.

The only real disappointment is that Sega re-released *Magic Hat* in the UK and US as *DecapAttack*. While the level design and gameplay remained identical, Sega replaced the vibrant visuals with a sombre Halloween theme that didn't sit well with owners of *Magical Flying Hat*. Still, at least UK gamers actually got to play it this time…

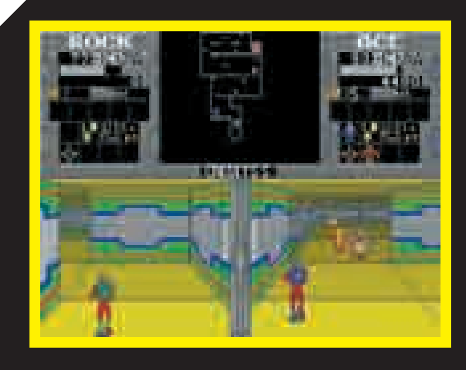


▼ Some sections, such as this manic chase across the landscape, required plenty of co-ordination and practice.

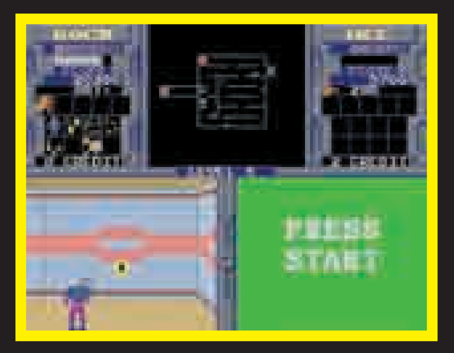
▲ Blue skies in games are good, but Sega ruined it all by turning this game into *DecapAttack*. Boo.

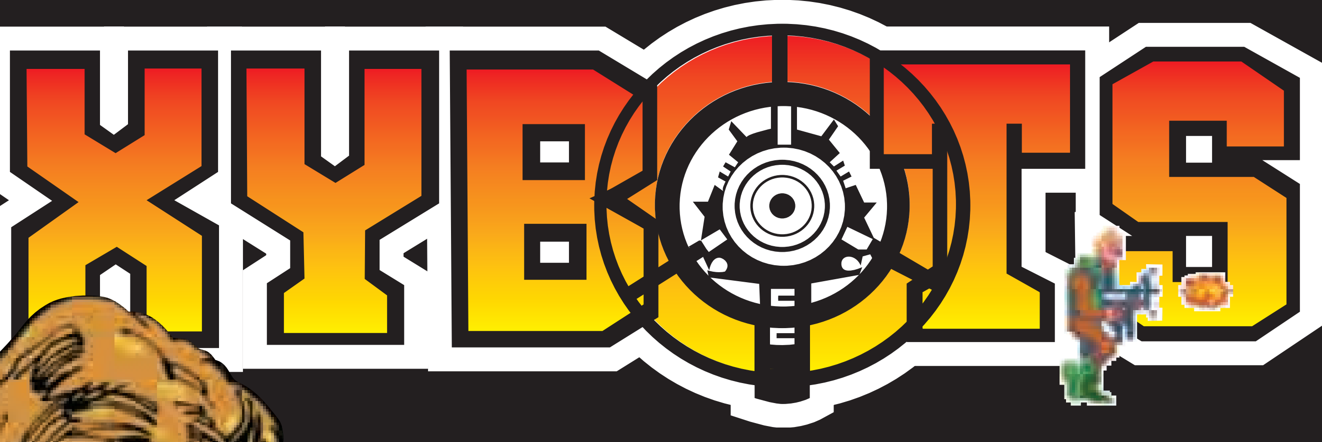


THE SENTINEL (Various Home Systems) Firebird, 1986 – Original UK Box Art









XYBOTS

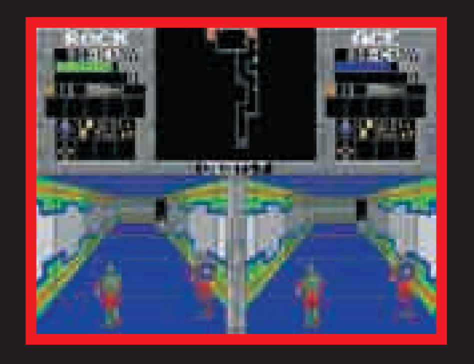
BEST REMEMBERED AS THE CREATOR OF ASTEROIDS, CENTIPEDE AND GAUNTLET, ED LOGG HAS PRODUCED ALL MANNER OF UNIQUE GAMES SINCE SUPER BREAKOUT IN 1978. WITH MANY OF HIS CLASSICS EXTREMELY WELL DOCUMENTED, RETRO DECIDED TO TALK TO HIM ABOUT XYBOTS, A RARELY DISCUSSED CLASSIC THAT'S CURRENTLY AVAILABLE ON MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES: EXTENDED PLAY FOR THE PSP

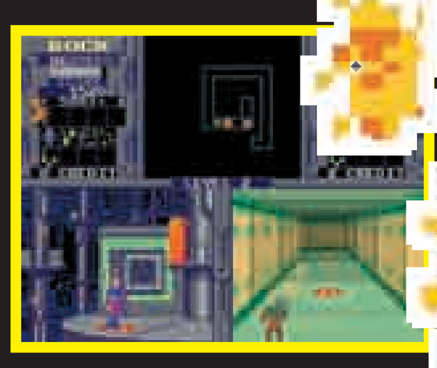
X*ybots* was overlooked in arcades due to its complex controls and tricky gameplay, it therefore failed to ignite interest from the gaming community. But, like a fine wine, *Xybots* has improved with age. After it appeared on Midway's *Arcade Treasures 2*, we still find ourselves running around its complex mazes, blowing the hell out of all and sundry. Add a great portable version courtesy of the PSP (the Lynx outing was also pretty good) and we can now blow up robots and collect coins whenever and wherever we want. Not bad for a game pushing 20 years old – after nearly not getting made in the first place.

Logg has been synonymous with the arcade scene (even if he did go on to make many console-exclusive titles) ever since he created *Super Breakout* and the phenomenal *Asteroids* a year

Release: 1987
Format: Arcade
Publisher: Atari Games
Developer: In-House







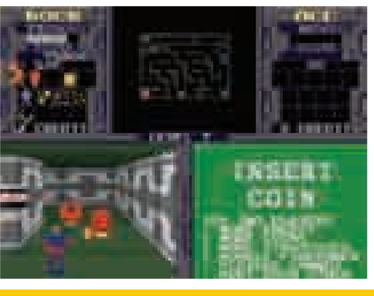
Behind the Scenes

LEARNING THE WAY

Despite the fact that they're not laden with fancy sound effects and state-of-the-art visuals, Logg is convinced that the reason retro games remain so popular is due to the games being so simple yet instantly rewarding. "While it's true that many retro titles are seen as simpler games which appeal to the general public – or 'casual player' as we call them in the game business – they can also be surprisingly deep. Many had multiple layers of strategy and a sense of ease that's rarely seen nowadays. Current titles seem content to deliver astonishing graphics and audio but the games themselves tend to be very overwhelming to the casual player and they have neither the time nor the inclination to spend any time learning the game in question." So there you have it, developers; make it good but keep it simple.



▲ It's amazing that despite being not much more than an intricate maze game, *Xybots* is still hugely enjoyable today.



▲ Not surprisingly then, Midway has included it on its *Arcade Treasures* collection for everyone to enjoy all over again.

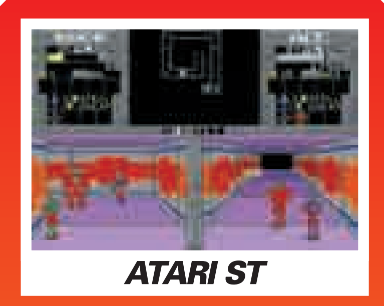
later. Mentioned in the same breath as arcade legends such as Eugene Jarvis, Dave Theurer and Yu Suzuki, Logg has been responsible for a vast number of hits across many genres. Like Jarvis, his games immediately send you into 'the zone', making you lose track of what you're doing. Hardly surprising considering the integral part that videogames have played in Logg's life.

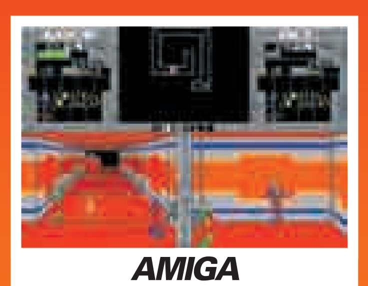
"I've always been into videogames," remarks Logg. "From high school, through college and into my first job, I was constantly doing something that involved gaming, whether it was just playing or actually creating them," he recalls. "I'd often get into trouble because of my interest. I remember during my TRW summer job being asked to stop using the company's computers to solve puzzles, while on another occasion I was asked by Control Data Corporation to not use its printers to print pictures. I'd only asked them if they'd fix the head alignment on it… In 1977 I even went so far as to build my own home computer that I used to play games on, so it's safe to say that gaming has had quite a big impact on me over the years."

With his keen interest in gaming it was, perhaps, inevitable that Logg would find himself involved with one of the biggest players in the industry, Atari. "A friend had already joined and at the time it was just across the street from Control Data Corporation where I worked," begins Logg. "I had previously had a chance to play on a prototype of either the VCS or Atari's 2600 (I can't remember now, it was a long time ago) at a Christmas party around 1976/1977 and thought it was a fantastic little toy. As a result, I felt it was time for a change of scenery and sent in an application. I passed the interview and the rest, as they say, is history."

Although Logg's first project *Dirt Bike* (which he finished for another programmer) never went into production, his first game to be released became an instant hit. That game was *Super Breakout*. The mega smash *Asteroids* quickly followed and Logg became a darling of the industry. The early years of videogames were highly experimental with the release of many exciting titles. Some – like *Space Invaders, Pac-Man* and *Galaxian* – became overnight successes while others simply fell by the wayside. Still, it was this experimentation that gave birth to classics such as *Defender, Robotron* and *Dragon's Lair* with many cabinets built specifically for just the one game. *Xybots* was a classic example featuring a swivel top joystick that could be twisted to enable your on-screen character to rotate through 360 degrees. The end result was an impressive-looking blaster that forced you to negotiate mazes that got larger and more convoluted the deeper you progressed while blasting away at an array of opponents. It's a quirky title inspired by two, very different titles. Id's *Doom* and Logg's own *Gauntlet*.

"THE EARLY YEARS OF GAMING WERE VERY EXPERIMENTAL AND GAVE BIRTH TO CLASSICS SUCH AS DEFENDER AND DRAGON'S LAIR"


ATARI ST


AMIGA

THE GOOD AND THE BAD

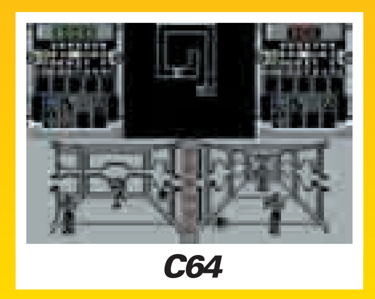
Like many arcade games, *Xybots* was quickly ported to every 8 and 16-bit system available but suffered a rough transition mainly due to its complex control system.

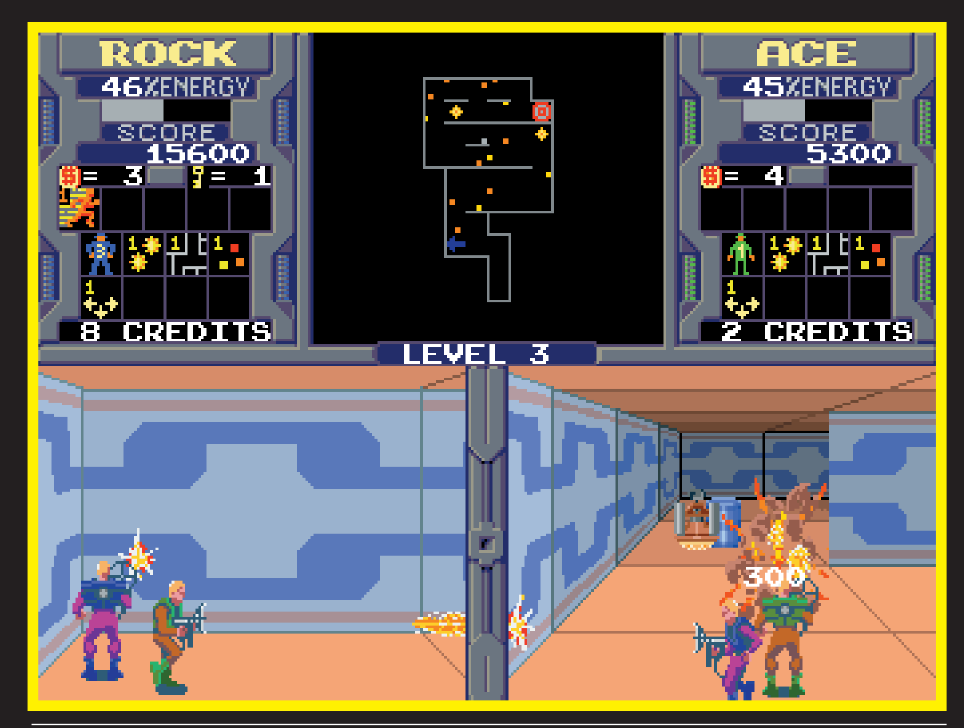
While the Amiga and Atari ST versions were at least able to reasonably emulate the original look of the game – thanks to their superior visuals – the 8-bit versions fared less well, with the Amstrad and Commodore 64 outings looking particularly bad. Sadly, all five versions were hamstrung by their controls and, as a result, *Xybots* received middling scores in various publications.

Later versions such as the Atari Lynx fared much better – although the controls were still far from perfect – but it wasn't until the later consoles appeared that everything that made *Xybots* fun to play was successfully emulated.



AMSTRAD


C64



▲ Playing with a friend made the game far more frantic, although it also meant you'd argue over distribution of power-ups and money found along the way.

YOU GOT ISSUES

"Doug Synder, an ingenious engineer/technician at Atari, and myself were talking about how we could create *Doom* on our existing hardware," recalls Logg. "Sadly, we had no bitmap hardware so we couldn't employ the same technique as *Doom*. Fortunately, I had an idea that I could create something similar if I was able to limit the number of angles that the player could view. I created the maze-like tiles by hand, using 8x8 pixels to prove it was possible, and that was essentially how the game graphics got started. So, in essence, *Xybots* started off life as a challenge to replicate an FPS without the use of any bitmap or 3D hardware. Once we'd decided how *Xybots* would look, the actual graphical style was very easy to implement. We had motion objects for the Xybots' many enemies and shots, and the playfield stamps were all that I needed for the actual backgrounds."

Despite having few problems with *Xybots*' unique style, production was far from smooth, with Atari often questioning whether a release was actually feasible. "I had three main issues with *Xybots*, so the development process was quite rocky at times," confirms Logg. "The first hurdle we encountered was building a controller that would do what the game needed. Luckily, this was just a technical problem that our mechanical design department was eventually able to solve."

"A much larger issue was getting the public to use and accept the new controller in the first place," he continues. "This was a very difficult problem and, to be honest, I don't think we ever successfully solved it. I also believe it was *Xybots*' very control system that resulted in its lower earnings and reduced sales." Indeed, the public seemed to find the control system so complex that, at one stage, Logg wasn't even sure if the game would go into production, despite the fact that it was already up and running. The biggest dilemma for Atari was explaining to the public that the character's viewpoint could actually change. "There are always problems with new controls from a design standpoint but, as I pointed out, the real problem was getting the general public to accept them in the first place," continues Logg, clearly warming to the subject. "It became increasingly clear in our field tests that many people didn't know that the controller rotation would actually change their viewpoint. And no matter how we tried, not everyone got it and it became *Xybots*' main weak point. Nowadays, the general public is a lot more sophisticated and it's quite possible that *Xybots* would have been a success – back in 1987, though, it just wasn't to be…"

"The third issue was political and to this day I still have regrets that I didn't do anything about it," continues Logg. "Before we decided on *Xybots*, the original game was called *Gauntlet III: Catacombs* and

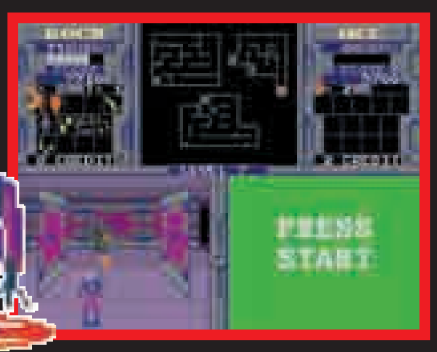
"DESPITE USING A NEW DIMENSION, XYBOTS RETAINS THE ENEMY-FILLED MAZES AND THE TEAMING UP ELEMENT THAT MADE THE GAUNTLET GAMES SO POPULAR"



▲ The simple control method made getting the hang of *Xybots* incredibly easy… but making it through alive was another matter entirely.



▲ Sparing the time to track down extra dollars meant you could reap the benefits in the shop, but it meant risking running out of suit energy.



featured all of *Gauntlet's* original characters. Frustratingly, marketing didn't want any more *Gauntlet* games and insisted we change the theme of the game. Yes, you heard right! Bob Flanagan, my co-programmer on the project, and I changed it to a *Major Havoc* theme. I still believe we should have kept the *Gauntlet* name and theme."

FOND MEMORIES

When you consider Logg's revelation, having *Xybots* as the spiritual successor to Atari's famous slash-'em-up actually makes sense. Despite using a new dimension, *Xybots* retains the enemy-filled mazes that made *Gauntlet* so popular, loads them with loot and keys, and sees you descending deep into enemy territory. As with *Gauntlet,* the game worked just as well if you were playing on your own or with a friend. Teaming up gave you the advantage and allowed you to move deeper into the game, but there was still a healthy degree of competition and you'd often break away from the hectic action to grab yourself a few extra coins.

Perhaps the biggest difference between the two games – aside from the perspective, of course – is that *Xybots* is missing two extra players. A fact that may help to explain why Atari was so reluctant to re-use the *Gauntlet* moniker. "Despite trying, there was no way we could get four players up and running, mainly because of the game's perspective," admits Logg. "As *Xybots* was unable to offer the same sort of co-operation that had been possible on both *Gauntlet* titles, it was, perhaps, inevitable that its earnings could never compete." Indeed, *Xybots*' lack of earnings was the main reason Logg was never commissioned to create a sequel. A travesty, as *Xybots* was ahead of its time and offered a unique experience that similar games of the era were unable to match.

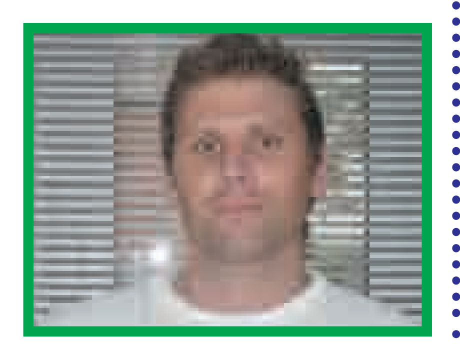
Those who did click with Logg's creation however, found a title with depth and secrets galore, although Logg himself was unable to tell us any. "God, it's been so long," he groans when questioned about any possible hints he could give us. "I'm not sure if I can give any specific secrets other than to say that *Xybots* was a title that required the player to learn specific techniques and master the ability to shoot and dodge." A shame, as we've already discovered a few tricks ourselves – like the ability to shoot around corners without allowing your opponents to fire back. Interestingly, Logg can't remember if this was a design he'd implemented or if it was discovered by resourceful gamers. "*Xybots* was a long time ago now, and I can't recall that at all," he admits. "I do remember that there were plenty of techniques for moving forward, turning and generally retreating – you'll have to discover all the other secrets for yourself."

Secrets aside, one thing Logg is convinced of is that *Xybots* would no longer work if released today – even if it was sufficiently updated. "To be honest, FPSs in particular have left this game far behind," he says. " It's not just a case of competing on a graphical front, the current generation of online titles has now taken multiplayer gaming to a whole new level." Despite his views, Logg's pleased that *Xybots* is still being enjoyed by so many gamers – even if he never managed to play any of the actual home conversions, "I had nothing to do with any of them," he confirms. Never mind, Ed, maybe we'll send you a copy of *Midway Arcade Treasures 2*…



THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION

THIS MONTH'S ULTIMATE COLLECTOR IS COLIN HETHERINGTON, A 31-YEAR-OLD VAN SALESMAN FROM REDDITCH. AND WHEN HE'S NOT SELLING THE LATEST AUTOMOBILE, COLIN'S MORE THAN CONTENT WITH AMASSING ONE OF THE BIGGEST RETRO COLLECTIONS WE'VE EVER SEEN. INDEED, HE'D PROBABLY NEED THREE OR FOUR VANS JUST TO SHIFT IT ALL…



Q: So Colin, when did you first become interested in videogames?

CH: I was about 13 and regularly went to the local arcade so I could play *Double Dragon* with my mates. A little later, I treated myself to an import Sega Mega Drive and *Revenge Of Shinobi* (I couldn't believe the intro sequence, it's still great today) and I was hooked from there on.

Q: And when did your collection first start to take shape?

CH: I started collecting seriously about four years ago after I went on a trip to Tokyo. I came back with a ton of old systems and games, and it just began to snowball from there.

Q: All of your items are in incredible condition. Will you ignore systems that are incomplete or damaged, or will you pick them up anyway?

CH: No, far from it! If it's something pretty rare I'll buy it, clean it up and flog it on eBay (hopefully for a better price). When it comes to my own personal collection, though, I'm actually pretty fussy. Everything has to be either in mint condition or brand new for me to consider keeping it. All of my limited edition Dreamcasts, for example, are brand new, with many still bubble wrapped!

Q: How much would you say your collection is worth and what were the most expensive items?

CH: To be honest, it's very difficult to correctly value, as the market is constantly fluctuating for different systems. But I would say the most expensive items would have to be the Custom 78, Divers 2000 Dreamcast, The Stars Dreamcast and the Mazora. Saying that, though, I also have plenty of sealed PC Engine games that are as rare as hen's teeth, but even more so because they're still sealed and would cost an arm and a leg on eBay.

Q: That's quite a few Dreamcasts you have; surely it's your favourite system?

CH: Yes, I would probably say so, I think it's because it's an amazing machine with some technically amazing games available for it. In my opinion it was a better machine than the PlayStation2, but we'll never know what it was capable of as it was never pushed to its limits by software developers.

Q: So, come on, what's the obsession with Sega?

CH: I've always admired the way it makes highly original games that are amazing fun to play. I would love for it to get back into making



▼ Personally, we're insanely jealous of Colin's Hello Kitty Dreamcast – it's just so kitsch.



▼ The Dreamcast games, we can understand… but Ronald MacDonald? Now that's just plain scary.



▼ Every corner appears to be crammed with more games – we wouldn't even know where to begin.



hardware again, but I doubt that will ever happen because the European division of Sega is an absolute joke and Sega of Japan has even washed its hands of it. It seems to have no idea about making games that people actually enjoy. I've been lucky enough to visit Sega's headquarters in Japan a few times and it's an amazing building.

Q: So come on, Colin, what's your favourite game?

CH: Good question. I love all of the older Sega games and am also a huge fan of the *Biohazard* games. I'm not really too interested in the latest systems, but one game I played from start to finish was *Resident Evil 4* on the GameCube. Other than that, I'd have to say the *Shenmue* games for Sega's Dreamcast and the amazing *Panzer Dragoon Saga*.

Q: You seem to have a massive amount of import stuff there. Do you ever pick up PAL games?

CH: No, the only PAL game I own is *Panzer Dragoon Saga* for the Sega Saturn; I don't like the packaging for many systems and the artwork is usually terrible. Plus you can go into your local GameStation and pick up SNES or Mega Drive titles too easily, so I don't really class PAL stuff as truly collectible.



Q: So do you collect items to play, or just to hoard?

CH: I still play games but not nearly as much as I used to. I'm not really keen on this generation of hardware, but I am interested in seeing what the 360 will be capable of. If you feel a need to label me then I'm obviously a hoarder.

Q: Any items you're still looking for?

CH: I'm not really looking for games at the moment, I'm more interested in finishing off my systems. I'm particularly interested in completing my limited edition Dreamcast collection. I want to get both the red Christmas Seaman model and clear versions, but they both have to be brand new, which makes my task a little tricky. I'm also currently looking for a new Partners Dreamcast. One other system that I'm interest in is the FM Towns Marty. It has an amazing selection of games available and would be perfect to cover in your magazine.

Q: What would be your advice to anyone that wanted to start collecting?

CH: My advice would really be to start simply and just choose one initial system. Concentrate solely on that one machine and make sure that you actually have enough room to store everything! After that you can just continue the cycle with something else.



Q: Where do you get most of your games from, and have you ever discovered a real bargain?

CH: I get all of my systems and games from Yahoo Japan and I've actually managed to build up some very good contacts as a result. I'm also lucky enough to have a very good friend named Kazuhiro who lives in Japan and used to work at Sega. He has since started his own business but still manages to get me some great bargains. He's also another big Sega fan and has a complete Mega Drive collection.

Q: And finally, what does your family think about it all?

CH: Funnily enough, everyone in my family thinks that I'm absolutely crazy and should sell the lot. Somehow, I don't think I'll be taking their advice anytime soon.





Share your views about old-school gaming

Retro Contact

First Contact

If you're into retro gaming and you've got something to share with the world, why not write to us at: games™ Retro, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peters Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 2JS Or you can email: gamestm@paragon.co.uk

GOLDEN WONDER

Dear games™

I really enjoyed your 'greatest retro game ever' piece on *GoldenEye* last issue. It gave a nice overview of the game; one that I have spent more time on than any other, I reckon.

What I would really like to see, though, is an in-depth article on the influence the Rare classic has had, not only on the first-person shooter genre, but also on action games as a whole. Stealth, sniping, specific hit points on enemies… they're all things we take for granted in games these days, but before *GoldenEye* they were few and far between.

So, what I'm asking for is… more *GoldenEye*, please!

Eddie Jeffers

More *GoldenEye*? More? To be fair, we don't blame you, Eddie – we recall spending more than a few hours slugging through 00 Agent difficulty and so it'd be nice to dig deeper into exactly how the guys at Rare managed to create such an absorbing game. We'll look into it, and hopefully you'll see something very soon.



Good old *GoldenEye* – we owe you so much of our misspent youth.

SHOOTING OVERLOAD?

Dear games™

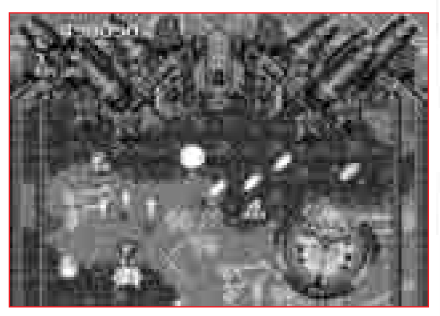
As an avid reader of your magazine – particularly the back end (no, I don't mean those lovely chatline ads) – I can't help but notice a worrying trend. Every month there seems to be more and more love for shmups and consequently, less coverage of the games that have really shaped the evolution of gaming.

Now, I like shooting things as much as the next man, but I fail to see why so much cover should be lavished upon a genre that hasn't moved on since *R-Type*. Sure, they're good, but do we really need to dedicate pages and pages to them? I honestly don't think we do.

I'd be more interested to read about the origins of genres that have really come into their own – adventure games or interactive movies, for example – rather than look at screenshots that are littered with more and more bullets that make me less and less interested in the section as a whole. Just a thought.

Come on guys – don't make me go back to reading *Retro Gamer*…

Aaron Clegg



Shmups are great. Really great. And if you disagree, you're an idiot.

Hmm. Now obviously we can't just start putting down the genre we (well, some of us anyway) love so dearly. Plus, aside from the usual retro collections – which, we gather, you're all starting to tire of – 2D shmups tend to be the only 'new' retro titles that come out these days. Can you blame us for bringing them to your attention? Of course not. Still, we suspect you'll see a slight reduction in our coverage of them over the coming months… if only because we listen to your concerns. Really.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

Dear games™

We all now know about Nintendo's secret – the potential genius that is the Revolution controller. We also all know that most of Nintendo's back catalogue is going to be available for download via the aforementioned new console. Therefore, the burning question on everyone's lips (well, my burning lips) is… will any of these games be re-jigged to incorporate the new controller?

Just imagine the possibilities… *Pilotwings* is a great example. How good would that be with full tilt control? It's a long shot, I know, but it'd be so good I'm just going to build myself up into a frantic fervour anyway. Then spend the next few years thoroughly depressed when it doesn't happen.

Gary Wigan

While we'd love to see it happen, unfortunately it's probably quite unlikely. After all, putting such ideas in would mean having to recode the original game (we believe, anyway), adding extra man hours to something that would otherwise be a fairly simple emulation job. But then, if Nintendo is going to allow us to play its games again without the fuss of having to









STAR LETTER

Dear games™
What's going on with the mass influx of retro compilation releases? It's not the collections themselves that bother me, more the deviousness of developers and publishers to ride the crest of the retro wave and spread series and legacy out across multiple compilation packs. It's just rude. You can't tell me that the entire content of all three *Midway Arcade Treasures* packs can't be squeezed onto one DVD, surely? Or that *Sonic Mega Collection* and *Gems Collection* couldn't co-exist as a single, value-for-money trip down memory lane?

And now Xbox Live is getting in on the act too, making us shell out several quid a time for access to old games on Live Arcade. Surely the Live subscription fee itself should be sufficient for players to get at least a couple of games? Again, rude. While a lot of firms assumed their back catalogue to be no longer profitable, a swell in emulation a good few years back proved otherwise and now anyone who ever put a game out is busting their nuts to make more money out of it going into 2006.

There must be people willing to pay for a few old games or these compilations – and indeed plug-and-play devices – wouldn't be filling shop shelves, but I simply can't abide it. £25 for a couple of Mega Drive games is an absolute disgrace! I really hope this retro revival dies down soon so I can go back to the inexpensive, nostalgia-tinged hobby that I used to enjoy so.
Phillip Edwards

You have a good point about publishers being stingy on the content. Considering how much you can get on a DVD, the lack of content that some collections have is quite shameless. As compensation for your misery, Phil, have a nice retro game on us. Go on. You deserve it.

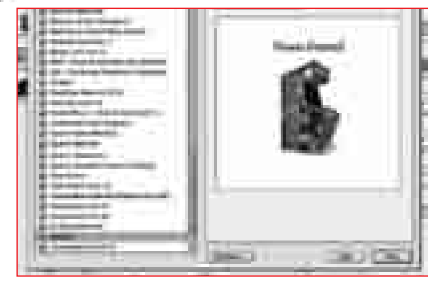
break out the SNES or NES every time we fancy a play… well, we're hardly going to complain too much about it. And maybe, just maybe, it'll mean more people taking up the retro mantle, and that can only be a good thing, can't it?

EMULATION NATION

Dear games™
I'm a fan of emulation, but I hadn't previously given much thought to the legality of it all (obviously, I know it's illegal but… well, you know) until the popularity of retro compilations such as *Midway Arcade Classics* and Capcom and Taito's current offerings became apparent. I've read about 'deleting them within 24 hours' or 'it's fine, providing you already own the game', but obviously, I doubt that companies such as Nintendo and Sega have the same take on emulation.

Anyway, my point is this: seeing as how interest in retro games is at an all-time high, do you think this now seemingly profitable niche in the games market will now make the big companies want to crack down harder on the emulation scene?
David Spence

Given the usually lax attitude given to past catalogue material by many publishers (not to mention promotional art and other items), we'd be tempted to say no… but then, clinging onto something you could theoretically make more cash on today is just good business sense. Therefore, expect to see Nintendo trying to protect its investments somewhat more vigorously when the Revolution arrives – after all, why would people want to pay for old SNES games when they can play them for free on their PCs?



Emulation is the best way of keeping memories alive… but it's illegal.

FOXED BY THE FOOL

Dear games™
Why do you keep going on about Cliff Johnson whenever you can? I downloaded *The Fool's Errand* from his website on your recommendation and now my head is hurting. I'm sure I'll go back to it, but can you please ask him why he has to make his games so hard?
Steve McCarthy

Ah… you're just rubbish, Steve. Sorry, that was a bit harsh. But games like *The Fool's Errand* aren't all that hard if you really put your mind to them… that's what makes them so appealing. It's something different from the usual action and platform retro games. We suggest you give it another go and hopefully it won't take long before you start to see things a little differently… either that or you'll go completely insane.







BUYERS' GUIDE

It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers are out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£60
Goldstar 3DO	£50-60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£50
Acorn Electron	£40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£10-25
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25
Amstrad GX4000	£15-30



ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST	£40 (with software)
Atari Lynx	£15
Atari Jaguar	£20-30

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic 20	£15-20
Commodore 64	£25-35 (varies according to model)
Commodore Amiga	£35-40 (varies according to model)
Commodore CDTV	£50-60
C64GS	£50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32	£35

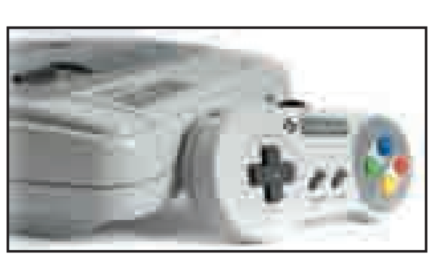


MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£70-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets	£100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun	£150-200 (varies according to model)

NEC

PC Engine	£50-100
Turbo Grafx-16	£50-60
Turbo Duo	£115-220
PC Engine GT	£50-150
Super Grafx	£200-300
PC Engine Duo	£70-130



NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£10-200 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£10
Game Boy Color	£15
Super Nintendo	£20-45
Virtual Boy	£75-100
Nintendo 64	£20-25

SEGA

Master System	£20-30
Master System II	£10-28
Mega Drive	£5-20
Mega Drive II	£10-25
Game Gear	£10-25
Mega CD	£40-60
Sega 32X	£30
Sega Nomad	£75-150
Saturn	£15-35 (depending on model)
Dreamcast	£20-200 (depending on model)

SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81	£40
ZX Spectrum 48K	£40-50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX Spectrum +3	£40

SNK

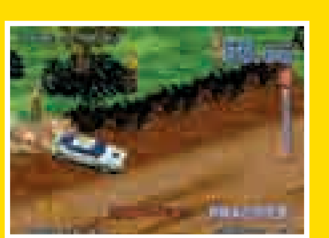
Neo-Geo MVS Single Slot (arcade system)	£70 (prices for multi-slots are higher)
Neo-Geo AES (home system)	£175-225
Neo-Geo CD	£125-175
Neo-Geo CDZ	£150-175
Neo-Geo Pocket Color	£30-50

Right, you've just picked up a second-hand console and are looking for some classics to play on it. The only problem is that you don't know what to go for. Hopefully we can help. Every month we will print the current range of prices for a range of classic games for a particular system. Of course, this is subject to change so don't be surprised if you manage to get one for less (or, unfortunately, more). This month we have a selection of the great arcade carts available for Neo-Geo's MVS.

Neo Drift Out

Estimated Price: £30-£60
Developer: Square

Neo Drift Out is a worthy MVS purchase as it was never released for SNK's home system. The fact that it is also a superb racer should only strengthen your purchasing decision. Using an isometric perspective that zooms in at certain points to fully immerse you in the on-screen action, *Neo Drift Out* is the perfect alternative to the Neo-Geo's plethora of brawlers – the high-speed action wasn't matched by anything else, which makes it a must in our books. As always, though, be aware of possible bootlegs; you don't want to be spending cash on cheap imitations.



Neo Turf Masters

Estimated Price: £25-45
Developer: Nazca

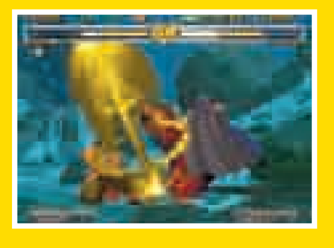
There are a couple of golf titles available on the Neo-Geo, but few come close to the majesty of *Neo Turf Masters*. The graphics are incredibly vibrant (despite the fact that it's just golf), the control system is sublime and the gameplay itself is hellishly addictive. While the CD version has superior music – not surprising, considering that it's running off a CD – the lack of loading times offered by the more conventional cartridge is a welcome trade-off. And when you consider that the AES version can sell for as much as £400, buying it on MVS makes even more sense.



Garou: Mark Of The Wolves

Estimated Price: £30-£60
Developer: SNK

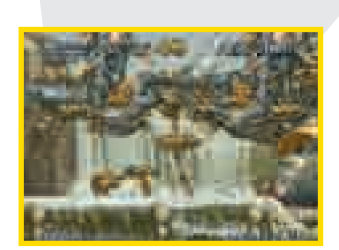
While they may not like to admit it, some beat-'em-up aficionados actually prefer *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* to Capcom's awesome *Street Fighter 3: Third Strike*. It is a thoroughly deserved reputation and even the briefest of plays will convince you that *Garou* is an essential fighter. Spend longer with it, and you'll discover an amazingly deep game that you won't be able to put down. Forget the PS2 and Dreamcast versions; no loading times and a wallet-friendly price (at least compared to the home cart) makes *Garou* a key MVS title.



Metal Slug

Estimated Price: £30-£70
Developer: Nazca

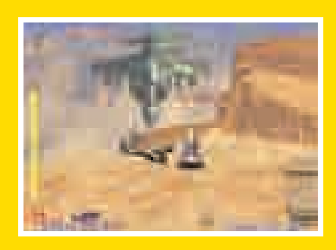
While *Metal Slug* is usually one of the more expensive MVS carts, it's a drop in the ocean when you consider that a mint AES version can cost up to £1,000. While the third outing is a better game in a lot of ways – more vehicles, enhanced animation and ingenious level branching – many gamers still regard the original *Metal Slug* as the best purely because it was the innovator. Sure, it's available for the Saturn and PlayStation, but why would you opt for a version with inferior animation and longer loadings times when you can have an arcade-perfect port for around £50?



Shock Troopers

Estimated Price: £25-40
Developer: Saurus

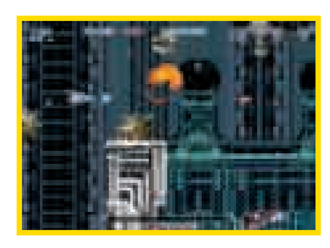
The sequel to this game has a superior graphical style but *Shock Troopers* still remains a superb blaster – especially as it's so reasonably priced compared to some of its rivals. Think of it as a steroid-fuelled version of *Mercs* and *Commando*, with a side helping of *Ikari Warriors* for good measure. Like *Neo Drift Out*, *Shock Troopers* is yet another title that failed to receive a home release; needless to say it often fetches high prices on eBay. Fortunately, it's fairly easy to source so you shouldn't have a problem picking a copy up.



Pulstar

Estimated Price: £25-£40
Developer: Aicom

There are some utterly brilliant shooters available on the Neo-Geo but few match the sheer excitement that Aicom's *Pulstar* offers. With similar gameplay to the *R-Type* titles, *Pulstar* sweats excitement and is one of the more frenetic shooters we've encountered. It's also harder than a Glaswegian headbutt and will have you screaming blue murder at the screen. Stunning visuals and fantastic level design more than compensate for the insane difficulty – the end result being a game that no MVS collector should be without.



Samurai Shodown II

Estimated Price: £5-£15
Developer: SNK

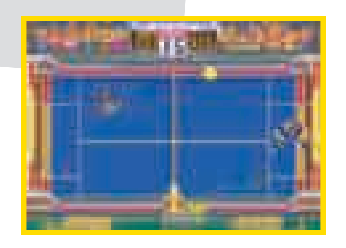
While we're huge lovers of the *Last Blade* franchise, *Samurai Shodown* is so inexpensive to pick up these days (and bloody amazing to boot) that we just had to give it a mention. Featuring a shining selection of characters, plenty of gore and bloodshed – always a plus in sword-based 2D fighters – and some fantastic gameplay that could keep you hooked for days, *Samurai Shodown* is seen by many as the pinnacle of the series and at the low price the MVS cart currently goes for, it's an unmissable addition to your collection.

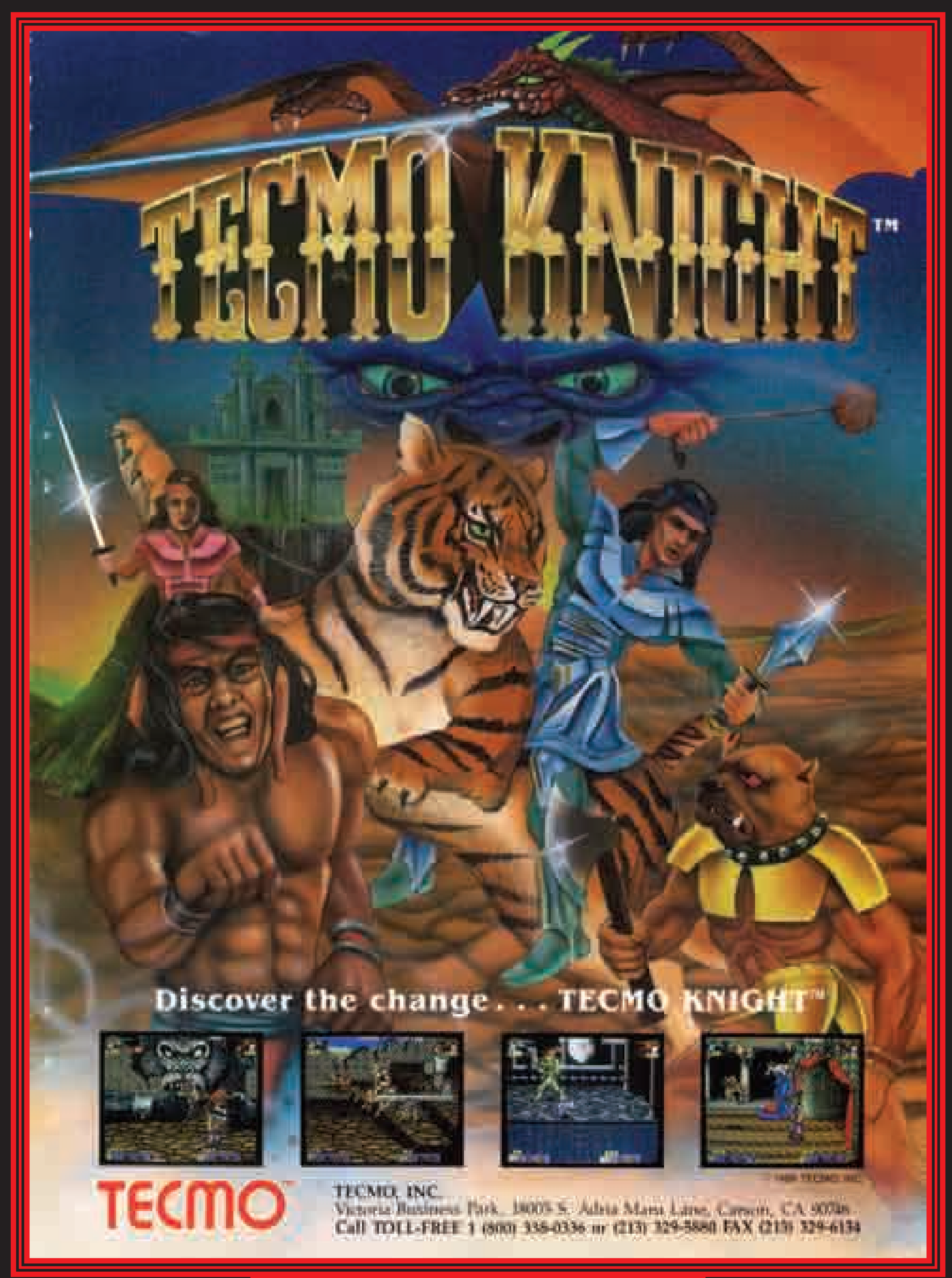


Windjammers

Estimated Price: £10-£20
Developer: Data East

Windjammers has everything you could ask for in an arcade game. It's ridiculously competitive, features easy-to-pick-up yet surprisingly deep play mechanics, and is more fun than a barrelful of monkeys. While Data East's superb sports title is nothing more than a supercharged version of *Pong* (albeit with frisbees), it's put together with so much style and panache that you can't do anything more than love it for the amazing game that it so obviously is. Nice and cheap to get hold of too, if you know exactly where to look…





TECMO KNIGHT (Arcade), Tecmo, 1989 – Promotional arcade flyer


eMag

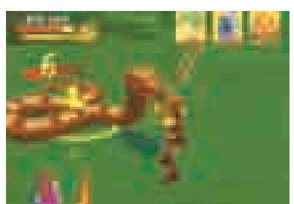
ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-



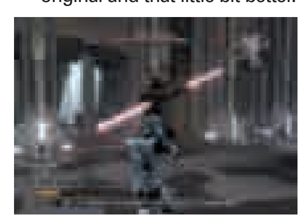
RADIATA STORIES

Square Enix's oddly named new franchise might not rival its more popular titles in terms of quality, but look no further for a charming and enjoyable RPG experience. Also, the lead character is named after a dog, which always seems to make us giggle. Silly us.



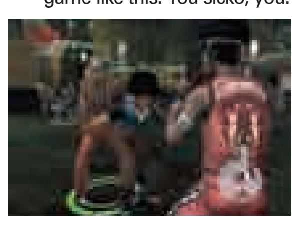
STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT II

Massively fixed since preview stage and incorporating many of the ideas that were suggested after the release of the first game, *Battlefront II* is exactly how sequels should be – true to the original and that little bit better.



THE WARRIORS

'Ban this sick filth' and all that – Rockstar is back with as faithful a movie licence as you're likely to find. And better still, it's actually a pretty good game to boot. If violence is your thing, there's little more you can ask for from a game like this. You sicko, you.





PLAYSTATION2

Manufacturer Sony
UK Launch Date 24 November 2000
Media 4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £104.99

The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. Thanks to Sony's reputation, though, it's still the most popular console around – a trend that will no doubt continue now that the remodelled, one-quarter-size PStwo is available in both traditional black and 'special' silver.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

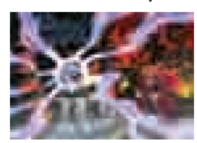
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix	Music games have never needed as much skill as this
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
Devil May Cry 3	Capcom	In-House	Hard as nails but certainly the highlight of the series
Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness	Atlus	Nippon Ichi	Like your RPGs practically endless? Then this is for you
God Of War	Sony	In-House	Sony's answer to *Devil May Cry* is a godly delight
Gran Turismo 4	Sony	Polyphony Digital	Worth the wait, thankfully – even without the online mode
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	Bigger, badder, better – a great *GTA* experience
Gitaroo Man	THQ	Koei	The genuine thing of rhythm-action beauty
Hitman: Contracts	Eidos	Io Interactive	Silent but deadly – a real killer of a game
Ico	SCEE	In-House	Possibly the most beautiful game ever made
Makai Kingdom	Koei	Nippon Ichi	Another example of why Nippon Ichi rules the RPG world
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	Konami	In-House	Flawed genius, but genius nevertheless
Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time	Ubisoft	In-House	The original still reigns for style and substance
Pro Evolution Soccer 5	Konami	In-House	The best football game around? Yes – again
Rez	Sega	UGA	Deceptively simple – draws you in before you know it
Shadow Of The Colossus IMPORT	Sony	In-House	So simple and yet such an absorbingly beautiful game
SSX On Tour	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	A great refinement that enhances the series further
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	Neversoft	Better? Again? How does Neversoft keep doing it?
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	In-House	By far the deepest 3D fighting game around today
We Love Katamari IMPORT	Namco	In-House	Just as quirky as the original, which makes it brilliant

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

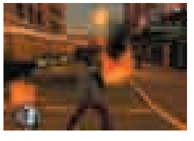
Rez
Hypnotic, gorgeous and stylish. Those who don't own this synaesthetic masterpiece are going to hell. Seriously.



Makai Kingdom
How do we love you, Nippon Ichi? Let us count the ways… by levelling up our Prinnies to the max. Yay.



GTA: San Andreas
What a ridiculously massive game – a year on, we bet you still haven't done everything yet. Anyone for coffee?



Amplitude
Any way you look at it, music games don't come much better than this eye-melting, finger-hurting delight.



Gran Turismo 4
Does for driving what *Forza* and *Project Gotham* do for racing. An acquired taste but a yummy one nonetheless.











XBOX

Manufacturer Microsoft
UK Launch Date
13 March 2002
Media
4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £99.99

Despite a slow start, the Xbox has swiftly become one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded, although the Xbox is far more accessible to gamers than most PCs. Despite the upcoming Xbox 360, Microsoft has pledged to support the console until at least 2007.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	Electronic Arts	DICE	Online and off, this is the definitive console shooter
Burnout Revenge	EA Games	Criterion Studios	Another high-speed smash of a success for Criterion
Chronicles Of Riddick: Butcher Bay	Vivendi Universal	Starbreeze Studios	A fine example of great gameplay and top-notch graphics
Def Jam: Fight For New York	Electronic Arts	Aki Corporation	Ultra-violent fighting has never looked so good
Fable	Microsoft	Big Blue Box	A special breed of RPG – well worth experiencing
Fahrenheit	Atari	Quantic Dream	A hauntingly beautiful and intriguing adventure game
Forza Motorsport	Microsoft	In-House	No *GT4* comparisons – just a solid Xbox racing game
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	Smilebit	Cel-shading at its very best and a soundtrack to die for
Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	BioWare	One of the best *Star Wars* games ever made
Ninja Gaiden Black	Microsoft	Tecmo	Damn tough, but a great example of style and gameplay
Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath	Electronic Arts	Oddworld Inhabitants	A complete change of pace for *Oddworld* that really works
Out Run 2	Sega	Sumo Digital	Stunning reproduction of a great arcade game
Pro Evolution Soccer 5	Konami	In-House	The only football game worth owning, period
Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo	Scarier than anything else out there today
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway	In-House	An enjoyable and solid psychic blasting romp
Psychonauts	Majesco	Double Fine	Wonderfully unique and enjoyable, if a little short
Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	Ubisoft	In-House	An essential update to the hugely popular Live game
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	In-House	The best *Splinter Cell* yet, thanks to the co-op mode
Street Fighter Anniversary Collection	Capcom	In-House	The greatest collection of fighting games ever? Oh, hell yes
TimeSplitters: Future Perfect	Electronic Arts	Free Radical	An infinitely expanding universe of online blasting action

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow
With *Lockdown* losing the plot somewhat and *Black Arrow* at budget price, Clancy's former is the better option.



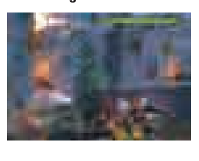
Fable
Be a great hero or a bit of a bastard in Molyneux's not-quite-as-great-as-he-claimed-but-still-good adventure.



TimeSplitters: Future Perfect
The FPS genre sure is a crowded place, but in terms of pure shooting, Free Radical can't be beaten. Fact.



Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath
Admit it – you didn't buy it, did you? Don't come crawling to us if Lanning's crew decide not to bring back Abe…



OutRun 2
True to the brand in every way you could wish, Sega's beautiful racer deserves a place in any games collection.

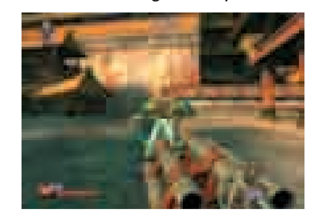






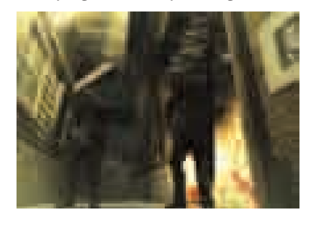
SERIOUS SAM II

You know exactly what you're getting when you exchange cold, hard cash for a copy of a *Serious Sam* game – more shooting than you know what to do with. Great fun in moderation, but overdo it and you'll never want to spend another bullet again. Maybe.



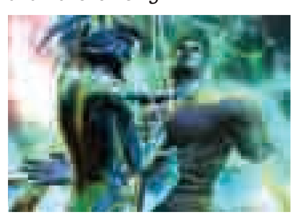
CALL OF CTHULHU: DARK CORNERS OF THE EARTH

You may have heard some bad things said about *Call Of Cthulhu*. Ignore them – they're written by imbeciles. With the lights down low and surround sound cranked up high, you'll never find a more terrifying or atmospheric game.



MARVEL NEMESIS: RISE OF THE IMPERFECTS

Everything that is wrong about videogames collected on a single disc and sold for an astonishing £40. Even if it was 40 pence, a Mars Bar is still by far the better option. Leave it to rot next to *Vexx* and *Advent Rising*…



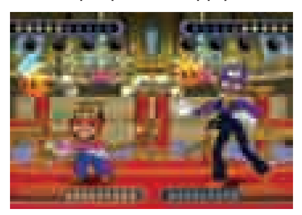
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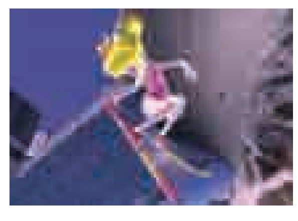
DANCING STAGE MARIO MIX

It's fair to say that a rhythm action game is only as good as its soundtrack. Unfortunately, that makes *Dancing Stage Mario Mix* a really rather poor game. Only blinkered Mariophiles and deaf people need apply here…



SSX ON TOUR

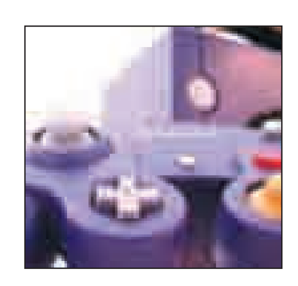
And speaking of Mario, he's a prolific little chap, isn't he? EA's catalogue is rapidly filling up with ways for the workshy plumber to be more and more extreme but does that make them bad games? Oh hell no. *On Tour* represents the pinnacle of the series to date.



LOST IN BLUE

When people talk about desert island games, we're not sure this is really what they're talking about. Still, there's no denying that *Lost In Blue* is a unique adventure – firm grounding in reality really makes for a touching experience. No pun intended.





GAMECUBE

Manufacturer Nintendo
UK Launch Date 3 May 2002
Media 3-inch Optical Disc
Current Price £79.99

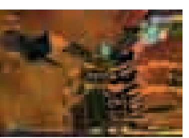
Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth a look. While third-party support is dwindling, it's the first-party releases that really offer some quality gaming. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games ever, so missing out isn't really an option if you love videogames.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

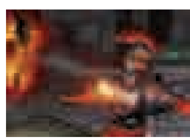
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	In-House	The only game to keep us playing for a full year
Alien Hominid IMPORT	03 Entertainment	The Behemoth	Hardcore 2D blasting with a sense of humour
Chibi-Robo IMPORT	Nintendo	Skip	Charming miniature robot fun – simple but effective
Eternal Darkness	Nintendo	Silicon Knights	Scary in a different sense – very intriguing
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision	Sega does it again with a brilliant retro remake
Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Ubisoft	Natsume	Highly absorbing – the *Animal Crossing* of farming games
Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House	Hard as nails and incredibly addictive
Killer7	Capcom	In-House	As arty as it is challenging – truly weird and wonderful
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	Camelot	Golfing fun without the need for Tiger Woods
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	In-House	A grower, by all accounts – take your time and enjoy
Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	Nintendo	In-House	Another great 3D outing for our favourite female bounty hunter
Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door	Nintendo	Intelligent Systems	Hugely entertaining and challenging at the same time
Pikmin 2	Nintendo	In-House	More flowery fun for those of a patient disposition
Resident Evil 4	Capcom	In-House	Reinvention on a scale that brings the series back to life
Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	In-House	Not perfect, but still a very fine *Mario* adventure
Super Monkey Ball 2	Sega	Amusement Vision	Monkeys and balls – what more could you want?
Tales Of Symphonia	Namco	In-House	An absolute beast of an RPG that will dominate your life
Viewtiful Joe 2	Capcom	In-House	A fine return for our favourite side-scrolling superhero
Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House	Far better than its clueless detractors will have you believe

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

Zelda: The Wind Waker
■ You know what you're getting with a *Zelda* game and visuals aside, *Wind Waker* is no exception. Wonderful.



Eternal Darkness
■ There's little scarier than being made to think that you're going insane by a videogame. Great fun though.



Resident Evil 4
■ The definitive action game of this generation may have gone to visit the PlayStation2 but this is still the version of choice.



Mario Kart: Double Dash!!
■ Haters be damned. *Double Dash!!* is a great racer that really shines in multiplayer. You like arguments, right?



Alien Hominid
■ Shoot. Die. Shoot. Shoot. Die. Shoot. Die. Die. Shoot. Shoot. Shoot. Win. Simplicity, thy name is *Alien Hominid*.









EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE

GBA

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 22 June 2001
Media Flash Cartridge **Current Price** £69.99



Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games can be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is available in a variety of colours, while the even more diminutive Micro is also out to buy now.

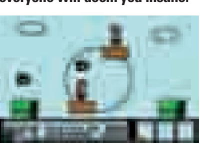
TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising	Nintendo	In-House
Astro Boy: Omega Factor	Sega	Treasure
Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami	In-House
Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo	Square Enix
Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones	Nintendo	In-House
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Camelot
Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town	Ubisoft	Natsume
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	AlphaDream
Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo	Camelot
Mario Vs Donkey Kong	Nintendo	In-House
Metroid: Zero Mission	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Pinball: Ruby And Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Emerald	Nintendo	In-House
Shining Force: Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon	THQ	Sega
Street Fighter Alpha 3 Upper	Ubisoft	Crawfish
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
WarioWare: Twisted!	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap	Nintendo	Capcom

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

Wario Ware: Twisted!

Spinny goodness courtesy of Mario's arch nemesis. Try playing this on the train and everyone will deem you insane.



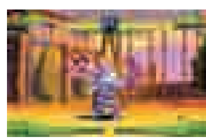
Astro Boy: Omega Factor

Thanks, Treasure – you've done what you do best and delivered a frantic and addictive plaform shooty thing. Cheers.



Street Fighter Alpha 3 Upper

Our love of all things *Street Fighter* probably hasn't escaped your notice; *Alpha 3* GBA is a stunning technical achievement.



PC

Manufacturer N/A **UK Launch Date** N/A
Media 4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc **Current Price** £variable



While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics and other special effects.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Battlefield 2	Electronic Arts	Digital Illusions
City Of Heroes	NCsoft	Cryptic Studios
Far Cry	Ubisoft	Crytek
Football Manager 2005	Sega	Sports Interactive
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
Grim Fandango	LucasArts	In-House
GTR – FIA GT Racing Game	Atari	SimBin Development
Guild Wars	NCSoft	ArenaNet
Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Valve Software
Hidden & Dangerous 2	Gathering	Illusion
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	NovaLogic	In-House
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House
Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
Rome: Total War	Activision	Creative Assembly
Sam & Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts
Sensible World Of Soccer	Sensible Software	Renegade
Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	Firaxis Games
The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	Maxis
Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	Epic Games
World Of Warcraft	Vivendi	Blizzard

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

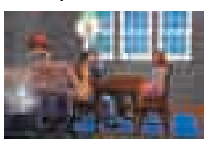
Sid Meier's Pirates!

Shivering timbers and splicing mainbraces are great fun. You don't do these things in *Pirates!*, but it doesn't matter. It's still awesome.



The Sims 2

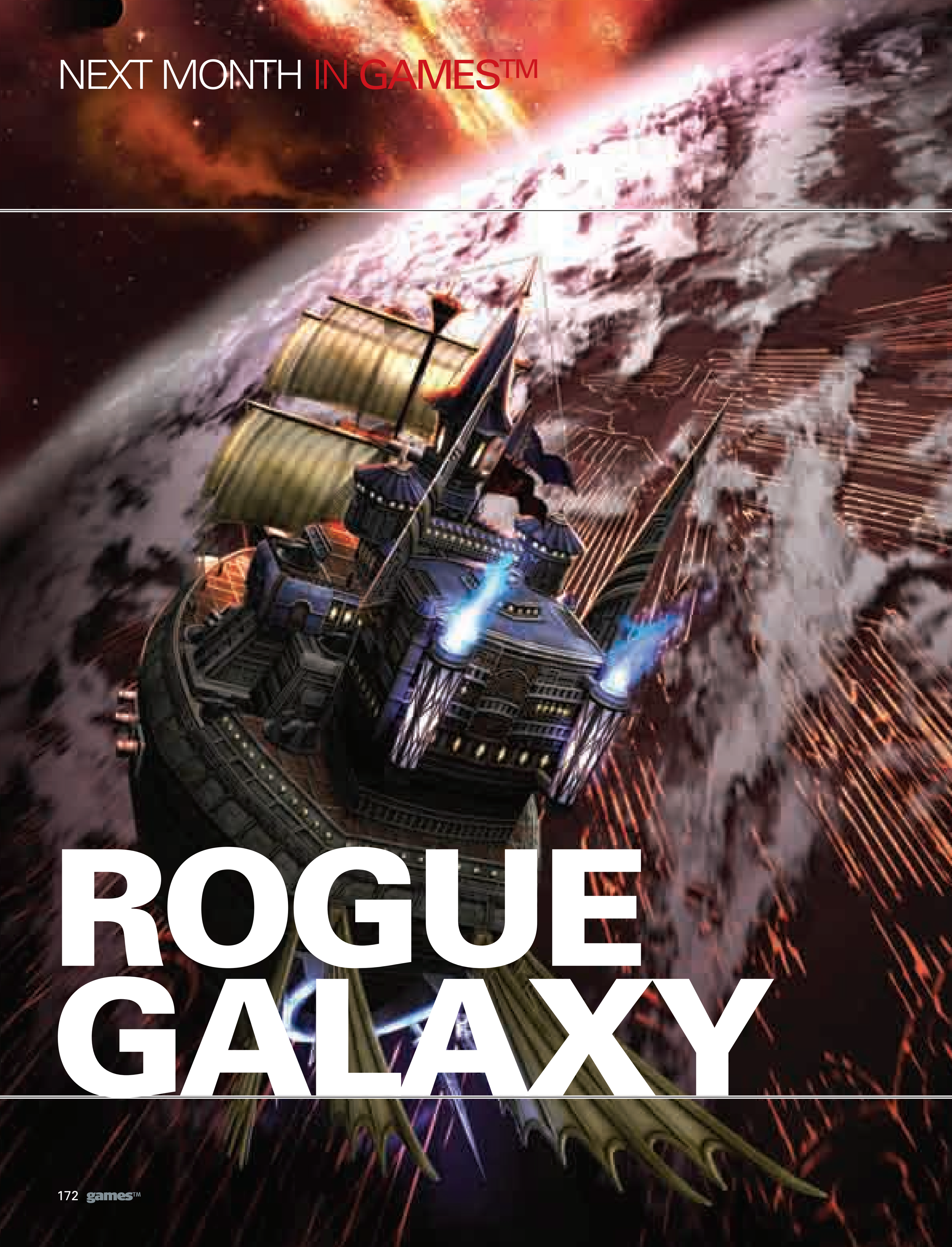
Virtual life is so much better than real life. Except the bit where you set fire to the kitchen because you can't make toast…



Rome: Total War

Scale is everything in The Creative Assembly's landmark strategy title. The recent add-on has renewed our love, too.





NEXT MONTH IN GAMES™

ROGUE GALAXY

NEXT MONTH





A tale of action and excitement, love and betrayal, adventure and (most important of all) treasure – Level 5's latest RPG after *Dragon Quest VIII* promises to be something extra special. games™ sets sail for Japan and plunders the depths of Sony's upcoming epic…

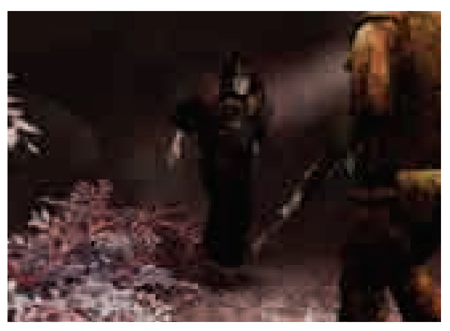


Why actually bother meeting your friends when you can hang out with them virtually?

MORE… REVIEWS

So it's into 2006 we go – time to mop up the Christmas surge and look to the future. Thankfully, there are still plenty of titles for us to clutch to our mighty busoms such as *Perfect Dark Zero*, *Guitar Hero*, *Dead Or Alive 4*, *Mario & Luigi 2*, *Amped 3* and more. Plus, we'll have the exclusive review of *Animal Crossing: Wild World* – the best reason to own a DS so far. Yay.

"WE DON'T EXPECT TO HAVE ANY SOCIAL LIFE LEFT ONCE WILD WORLD ARRIVES…"



The first *Forbidden Siren* was scary enough, but the sequel is already looking terrifying.

MORE… PREVIEWS

The life of a gamer never seems to end; just when one busy period ends, the next batch of games turns up. Not surprisingly, 2006 is already looking rather fine – from Sony's upcoming titles such as *Forbidden Siren 2* and *Rogue Galaxy* to the likes of *Tomb Raider Legends*, *Def Jam 3*, *Final Fantasy XII* and the return of *Sensible Soccer*, it all sounds good to us.

"ALL THE SCARES OF THE LAST GAME, BUT NONE OF THE MOCKNEY ACCENTS"



OutRun – a pinnacle of racing excellence, and we'll be looking at its creation in Retro next issue.

MORE… FEATURES

Another month, another visit to a great developer – this time, it's Sumo Digital who may have some secret projects to discuss. We'll also chat to the likes of Blizzard and Fumito Ueda about their future plans, and take a peek into the seedy underbelly of the MMORPG world. Retro, as always, offers up some choice nuggets of classic gaming goodness.

ON SALE 29 DEC 05

CONTACT

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Enough of what we think – now you get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry. Or not…

Making Contact

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

games™, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peters Road, Bournemouth, BH1 2JS

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the internet. Email us at this address: **gamestm@paragon.co.uk**

Alternatively, why not get yourself on our dedicated forum?

Step One:
Get yourself online. It's fairly simple, so we're sure you'll think of something.

Step Two:
Type the following into the browser window: **www.gamestm.co.uk**
You will arrive at the **games™** website. Nice, isn't it? Click on the 'forum' icon near the top of the page. If you're a first-time visitor to the forum you'll have to register before you can post. Just click 'register', fill in a few details (such as a username and password) and you're away.

Step Three:
Ha! There is no step three. It's that simple. Just choose which thread looks most interesting then post your deepest, darkest thoughts (preferably concerning gaming) in there. There's even a dedicated letters thread where you can post anything you'd like to see on these pages.

games™ reserves the right to edit letters for space and/or clarity. The views expressed in letters on these pages are those of the correspondents and not **games™**. If you want a healthy debate, we'll see you on the forum…

WHEN I FIRST heard that the UMD format was to be used to play films I thought of it as nothing more than a gimmick, with Sony and third-party publishers using it to tote the then 'in' film for a short burst of profit. What's more, the types of films arriving on the format initially seemed to reinforce my theory. But now when I walk into a video shop, I see the format has grown faster than I'm sure anybody could have anticipated. UMD films sit proudly alongside DVDs and it's then that I realise they're fast growing into a common format. What's more, it seems the UMD is showing similar traits to that of the DVD when in its infancy. The format has moved from churning out current movies, and is now also focusing on producing UMDs from a vast back catalogue of films.

All this is good news, but the UMD films (like UMD games) are tied to the fate of the PSP, and so have an expiry date on them. There's little comfort in knowing the product you're about to buy will be rendered obsolete in a few years, but should this be the fate of the UMD film? My answer is no, because the UMD film has great potential. I can see Sony producing handheld UMD players, which would slash the cost greatly for people waiting to watch the film but not play the games.

However, the biggest drawback to UMD films is the limited size of the screen they play on. A person wanting to view films on the go and on the big screen at home will need to purchase two different formats. I feel Sony could do a lot more for the format if it produced a device that would allow the PSP to connect to the TV, allowing UMDs to be watched through them. Think how beneficial this would be; from the traveller who's always on business to the holidaymaker looking for an evening in. The Samsung E-600 mobile phone proves it can be done easily. Do you think I'm onto something here?
Psychobob

games™: Possibly, although such a device would also allow you to play PlayStation Portable games on your TV and, considering that would directly rival the PS2, we doubt that's a path Sony wants to go down. We'd be more keen to suggest that film companies start doing 'special edition' DVD packs that contain both the DVD and UMD of the same film in a single box – a slightly premium price wouldn't hurt such a package (to be frank, we're averse to paying £15 for a UMD film) and it'd save people having to buy the same thing twice. But that'd be too much of a sensible idea… wouldn't it?

THE FUNNIEST THING happened to me at work recently: a colleague who other staff would generally acknowledge as being 'cooler' than me was wearing an Atari t-shirt. Being the fool that I am, I bounded over to this office Fonz and said, "I didn't realise you were into your games." To which he replied, "I'm not – I just thought this t-shirt was nice." I felt stupid as I skulked back to my desk, but it did get me thinking: if videogaming is considered antisocial and childish to so many, why is retro gaming so culturally fashionable? If I sit at home all evening playing games then dart into the office the next day shouting, "Hey guys, guess what I did last night?" no one would come and shake my hand for managing to get

"THE **NOTION OF GAMES OF THE PAST** IS, IRONICALLY, **MORE CULTURALLY POPULAR THAN ACTUALLY PLAYING THEM**. WITH THIS IN MIND, I WISH I'D KEPT HOLD OF THE **MARIO BROS. 3 TRACKSUIT I HAD** WHEN I WAS 12"



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Gamers with a thing for fashion can always look to companies like Joystick Junkies to get them kitted out in suitably retro gear.



Yes, it's men touching men in an inappropriate way… but it's anime wrestling with plenty of humour, so that's okay then. Really, it is.

to level two on *Viewtiful Joe*. However, if I came in wearing a Pac-Man t-shirt with some witty slogan about eating power pills, I'd no doubt be invited to swanky office lunches in trendy noodle bars.

I can't help but notice that the notion of games of the past is ironically more culturally popular than actually playing them. With this in mind, then, I wish I'd kept the *Mario Bros. 3* tracksuit I had when I was 12 – I'm sure it would have made me look cool the next time I got a trendy coffee in Starbucks.

Julian Hill

games™: Unfortunately, it's only going to be natural that gaming should seep into the cultural subconscious like this – particularly in a retro way. We can't deny that we don't have a few items of clothing ourselves that regularly work their way into our wardrobe, but then it's all about the right look. As you say, something slightly more old-school or obtuse (such as a vague logo) is more likely to illicit an image of 'cool', we'd suggest having a look at what companies like Joystick Junkies have to offer. At least that might help boost your street cred. Well, maybe.

I WAS PLEASED to see someone 'brave' enough to dip their toes in the import gaming pool in Contact (Jessica Harper, gTM 38). It's true – Japan's seemingly limitless talent for producing good games based on anime and manga is something that all gamers should be made aware of, especially considering the dross that frequently comes out of western development houses. But there are also bonuses in being one of the handful that embraces eastern gaming. For starters, you'll all have games that many others won't have and when friends join in, you can educate them in new and exciting ways of gaming. Secondly, if games such as the *Naruto: Gekitou Ninja Taisen* series came to our shores (which it may do now that anime is being shown in America), I would expect nothing more than a poor translation and atrocious voice acting – the games would soon lose their charm. Fortunately, magazines such as this one aren't afraid to bring import games to our attention (*Ossu! Tatakae! Ouendan!* is easily my favourite DS game) and so import gamers will always be winners. Plus, being in the minority is cool.

In many ways, this letter is actually a thinly veiled plea to **games™** to become even more inspired by import gaming and review *Bleach GC! Tasogare Ni Mamieru Shinigami* which I would very much like to see tested soon…

Simon Watson

games™: There's no doubt that import gaming is an important thing for us here at **games™**, both as gamers and writers. Often,



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Enough of what we think, this is where you lot get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry

Text Life

Wot r u guys getting 4 Xmas then?
g™: We're all giving each other copies of *Vexx* – we love each other that much.

How come you didn't do a big feature on the Revolution like other mags did?
g™: Several reasons, the best being: we're waiting on the games. That's what's most important here.

Can I come and make the tea for all u guys? Pls?
g™: Sure. We like our tea like we like our women – in a plastic cup.

So, are you going to be reviewing *Half-Life 2* for Xbox?
g™: Most likely, yes… although from what we've seen, it should have been held over for the Xbox 360.

How on earth do you manage to fill 180 pgs every month?
g™: A lot of hard work, long hours and plenty of Super Noodles. That, and the pixies help us.

You went to Japan… was it really as good as it looks?
g™: Better. So much so, in fact, that we're considering moving out there permanently.

I'm going to wait for PS3, because my friends are – it's better than 360.
g™: Clearly, you're more in the know than we are; glad to see the playground grapevine is still ahead of the curve.

I've got a PSP, but spend all my time playing DS… is there something wrong with me?
g™: Yes. Yes, there is. Either that, or there might be some good games on it. We don't know.



Microsoft might already have the right idea with its soon-to-exist Xbox 360 lounges – even if they're not nearly dark and dirty enough.



Play *We Love Katamari* now, or wait until February? It's not a tough choice if you're into importing, although you need some know-how.

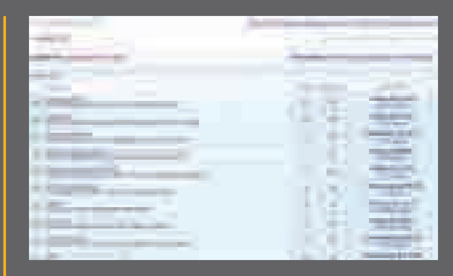
some of the best games only come out on the import market, although it's always sad when you find one that deserves more recognition (*Jump! Superstars*, for instance, will never make it out of Japan). And then there's the status factor – there's a fine line between dedication and hardcore arrogance, but it's always nice when you can help teach others about things they may have missed out on.

STEVE GRIFFITH'S LETTER (gTM 36) raises some interesting ideas; some sort of multiplayer games café/bar place would be genius. Clutching large hazelnut caramel lattes while sitting in giant armchairs. Solitary players shyly glancing at each other across a crowded room before getting wireless multiplayer *Band Brothers* going on their DSs where you can pay per play instead of investing 30 quid in a new title. A place where *Burnout Revenge* rubs shoulders with obscure Japanese shooter cabinets. It sounds like some kind of futuristic arcade! The dying arcade scene given a shot in the arm by filling it with the console games that made it largely obsolete, populated with real people to play with, spliced with a hefty dose of Starbucks. Standing in shady rooms with bright flashes, playing *Street Fighter II* for an audience of dodgy older kids was 1990s purgatory. This is the future… I see it now.
Alasdair McClement

games™: We'd like to think you've got something there, although we're always a bit cynical when it comes to taking ideas from paper to reality – we've seen too many promising businesses go under, purely because of public apathy. That said, a gaming 'lounge', properly supported, sounds like an excellent idea; especially if it got sponsorship from some of the bigger names. Whatever the case, we're behind you all the way – just give us a call when you've got it up and running.

MAYBE IT'S RISKY for a male reader to write about female gamers and characters, but I have to ask: why do games have such a bad reputation for shallow female characters? The consensus seems to be that female would-be gamers find it off-putting to be faced with the latest *DOA*-style oversized digital mammaries and 'whip-toting sexy vampire bitches'. Other female game characters are seen as weak and in need of rescuing. Is it true that games in general have this lack of depth, that there's an over-abundance of *DOA: Beach Volleyball*-style products aimed at the clichéd 14-year-old male? Or is it merely people's prejudices that make them look at Lara Croft and bemoan the breast size while ignoring Samus? No one complains of Mario being an insult to men (are we all overweight with menial jobs and unadvisable facial hair?), but Princess Peach





FROM THE FORUM

THE PRICE OF GAMING – HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

gets maligned as a hapless wench in eternal need of rescuing. Ico and Yorda are both captives at the start and while she can't jump/climb like he can, she can open the green doors with psychic powers. Neither can escape without the other, so whose abilities would you prefer? RPGs have more character depth than other genres, but here females are perceived as weaklings, both physically and emotionally. Dagger/Garnet in *FFIX* gets berated for having a psychologically disturbed period where she cannot use her abilities for a while. Why is distress seen as a sign of weakness? What's the alternative? A hard-assed, chain-wielding, cyber-dominatrix-outfit-wearing *Soul Calibur* uber-bitch? Marona in *Phantom Brave* is an incredibly strong person – friendless except for ghosts and cast out by the locals – undertaking missions at a mere 13 years old. Ashley in *Another Code* is another example. Why do these get ignored in assessments of female game characters? Is it political correctness gone mad, reading too much into polygons, or something more?
Stephen Hurler

games™: You're always going to find reactionaries when it comes to issues like women in games – the characters are either too butch or too weak, with no real ground in between. The problem obviously revolves around gaming being a male-centric pastime, but even so it's not an issue that we feel is as important as some make out. If there were no women in games at all, or only one kind (that being the overly feminine damsel in distress) then we could see a case for argument; thank god that's not the case, then.

HOW ABOUT A feature on the best ways to get and play import games? The PlayStation2 will play foreign DVD films with Action Replay, but what about games? GameCube plays NTSC code with a simple Freeloader disc, but PS2 import gaming seems to be all about buying foreign machines, step-down/up transformers and chipping PAL hardware. With recent Japanese/US PS2 releases such as *Dragon Quest VIII* and *Atelier Iris* to tantalise the UK gamer and confound with the lack of imminent PAL release, now is surely the time for the clueless like me to venture into import gaming. *Remote Control Dandy SF* is never going to be on sale in Woolworths and I must accept this. With Christmas in between the US and UK *Shadow Of The Colossus* releases, what's the simplest/quickest/cheapest way for a UK gamer to play it this year? If I don't get my hands on *Guitar Hero* soon, they will be put to evil work. Who are the most reliable importers, and which ones don't include import duties?
Callum Osmond

games™: There's certainly scope for some kind of feature although, to be fair, those actually interested in importing usually know where to start – websites such as NTSC-UK have dedicated help guides on getting your games working, as well as links to worthy importers. Companies such as PlayAsia are usually a good bet, although you'll often get stung on the import charges; if you're after US games (and don't mind going French Canadian) www.videogamesplus.ca is always worth a visit. Just don't blame us when your credit card bill goes through the roof, eh?

"WITH RECENT **JAPANESE/US PS2 RELEASES, NOW IS SURELY THE TIME** FOR THE CLUELESS TO VENTURE INTO **IMPORT GAMING**. REMOTE CONTROL DANDY SF WILL **NEVER BE ON SALE IN WOOLWORTHS** AND I MUST ACCEPT THIS"

Folkstonia
On average, we all pay about £30 for a new game. But do you think that games are worth it or do you think we should pay even more? When I think back to SNES games that used to retail at £50+, I can't help but think we're getting a great deal. Games are huge elaborate spectacles these days, often being in development a comparable amount of time to films, while graphics are better than they've ever been and will be even better with the next generation. So… do you ever sit back after finishing a game and think, "I only paid £30 for that, god bless this industry?"

Wholehole
With most games coming out at the moment, I usually think, "I paid £30 for that… god damn this industry!" But yes, occasionally, that thought does pop into my head when a particularly great game comes out.

Illdog
I must admit, after buying a game the price never enters my head again. I think the price gets forgotten as soon as I've punched in my pin and pressed OK – that's the problem with plastic money, it holds no value. But thinking about it, these days games ARE worth the money. Remember when *Turok* came out on the N64, it was something like £60? And my rich mate paid £110 for *Street Fighter II* on the SNES. And I just won *Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within* on eBay for £8. I know this thread is more based on the RRP of games, but somebody tell me that's not a bargain.

Hong Kong Phooey
I'm quite happy paying £30 for a new game (import or online) but I'm not sure about paying more. With so many games being released, I'm often waiting a few months for a price drop, so I end up getting newish games for £15. Now, when I've completed that game, I certainly do think that I've got very good value for money.

Gemini-Phoenix
A great percentage of games are worthy of a day's wages. But then, there are plenty that aren't worth a squirt of piss and are simply priced at £30-£40 because they know there are some idiots out there who will pay that for the latest *Bratz* game or movie tie-in. And just before Xmas, they're right… I resent paying over £20 for a Game Boy game – £30 is a rip off. I'm certainly not going to bother with PSP games until they drop to the £20 bracket, because it's just not worth the money. Console games are one thing, but portable games that are of lesser quality than their bigger counterparts are quite another. I often wonder while browsing around Virgin MegaStore, who actually buys their products priced up at £44.99, and unsealed at that. No wonder they still have copies of *The Bouncer* and *Fantavision* on the shelves.


games™